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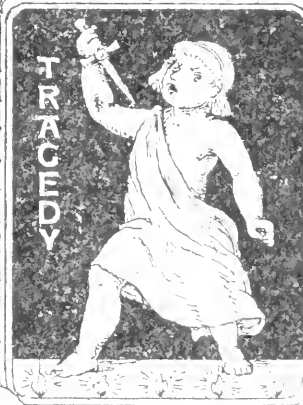
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THE BEWILDERING
MISS FELICIA

Price, 25 Cents



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BOSTON

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No. 5 Hamilton Place, Boston, Massachusetts

The Bewildering Miss Felicia

A Comedy of Rejuvenation
In Three Acts

By
GRANVILLE FORBES STURGIS

For Female Characters Only

(Written expressly for and presented by The Drama Club of the Denver Grade Teachers' Association at Woman's Club, Denver, Colorado, November 23, 1912, under the personal direction of their Coach, the Author.)

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BOSTON
WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

1913

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The Bewildering Miss Felicia

CHARACTERS

(As originally produced)

FELICIA FREEMAN, <i>the newcomer</i>	Ethel Thornburg.
MISS ADELINE PAISLEY, <i>an old maid</i>	Sarah Ketner.
MRS. CAPTAIN HIPPOLYTUS BIDDLE	Winona Andrews.
MRS. FREDERICK ADDISON, <i>divorced</i>	Ella Hummer.
MRS. ROBERT DOUGLAS, <i>honeymooning alone</i>	Jessie Lee.
MRS. MARCIA MURRAY, <i>a widow</i>	Anna Inches.
NORMA MURRAY, <i>her daughter</i>	Ilma Filger.
MISS MEHITABLE OGGSBY, <i>a landlady</i>	Lillian Blakley.
HANNAH JANE, <i>a drudge for Miss Oggsby</i>	Bertha Taub.
MISS LUCRETIA LONG, <i>inclined to be frivolous</i>	Barbara McBreen.
MRS. JOHN JOSE, <i>who sells butter and eggs</i>	Abigail Kendall.
SALLY JOHNSON, <i>a laundress</i>	Alice Lucy Moore.
FREEDOM, <i>colored, but free</i>	Miriam Hildebrand.
MAMSELLE, <i>maid to Felicia</i>	Essie Edwards.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I.—The vacant house. Exterior.—Late afternoon.

ACT II.—Miss Felicia's. Interior.—One year later.

ACT III.—Miss Felicia says "Good-bye." Exterior.—Six weeks later, afternoon.

TIME.—1830.

PLACE.—Lilac Village.

TIME OF ACTING.—Two hours and a quarter.



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hw 1

The Bewildering Miss Felicia

ACT I

THE VACANT HOUSE. LATE AFTERNOON, 1830

SCENE.—*A village street. Wood or garden set. L., across rear, a white Colonial mansion with porch, and before it a white picket fence. The gate is off its hinges, and the garden within neglected and run to weeds, with a few flowers still struggling for existence. On the porch is an old wooden chair. R. C. is a trellised summer-house covered with wistaria in bloom, and a few climbing roses. Within is a practical well, the bucket being on a rope which passes over a wheel in the roof of the summer-house. A gourd or tin dipper hangs on a nail beside the summer-house. A white bench is in front of the summer-house, and L., across stage, is another bench. All lights are on.*

(HANNAH JANE, a child of fourteen or fifteen, in full apron, hair in tight braids, is discovered at well, R., as curtain rises, drawing up a bucket of water.)

MISS MEHITABLE OGGSBY (*calling off R.*). Hannah! Hannah! Hannah Jane!

HAN. Oh, law! Can't yer leave a body alone long enough to git a drink of water?

(*Spills the water all over her dress as she tries to drink from the bucket.*)

MISS O. Hannah! Hannah Jane!

HAN. (*calling*). Yes'm. What is it?

MISS O. You come right here to once!

HAN. (*calling*). What's wanted?

MISS O. Never mind what I want; you come here. Do you hear me?

HAN. (*calling*). Yes'm. (*Comes out slowly.*) If life ain't just one screech after the other!

MISS O. Hannah! Do you hear me?

HAN. (*calling*). Yes'm. (*Meditatively.*) I wonder where she gits wind enough to keep up that steady yelling? If I had her lungs —

MISS O. (*more exasperatedly*). Hannah! Are you coming?

HAN. (*stopping for a final gulp of water*). Yes'm!

(*Shuffles slowly off R.*)

Enter MRS. MARCIA MURRAY and NORMA MURRAY, L. They are dressed for calling.

MRS. M. (*in astonishment*). Why, Norma, the very idea!

NORMA (*protestingly*). I know, mamma, but some one ought to call on her. She's a stranger, and —

MRS. M. What do we know of Mrs. Addison?

NORMA. Only that she's —

MRS. M. (*quickly and decisively*). That's just it, Norma.

NORMA. But, mamma, I don't see why the world should turn against a woman and call her an outcast just because her husband was bad and she got a —

MRS. M. (*stopping her quickly*). Sh! Such matters are not discussed in polite circles, my dear,—least of all by young ladies. When I was a girl —

NORMA (*crossing R., tossing her head*). I know, girls were perfect then, mamma.

MRS. M. Girls were more respectful and thought as their mothers did. But now! (*Throws up her hands in horror.*)

NORMA (*R., with toss of head*). Women are more independent! It's the spirit of the age.

MRS. M. (*with a sigh*). Thank goodness, Norma, I've brought you up carefully, and not like so many of the young women I see about us on every side! Why, if I had a daughter like some I've seen in New York and Boston, I really believe I'd have to be placed in a madhouse! (*Crosses R. to bench.*) Let us stop and have a drink of the old spring. It always revives me when I am weary.

NORMA (*crossing to spring*). Did you like the tea we had this afternoon?

MRS. M. (*sitting R. on bench*). It was rather strong.

NORMA (*drawing water*). I thought it decidedly bitter. I always imagine I taste copper in green tea.

MRS. M. That must be your imagination, Norma. I don't believe you really can.

NORMA. They say they dry the leaves on copper trays to get that green color. (*Passes MRS. M. gourd of water.*)

MRS. M. (*taking gourd*). Very likely, my dear, but you know you never can taste any copper in the cucumbers we preserve, and I always boil a couple of copper pennies in the vinegar to make them nice and green.

(*Drinks, and passes gourd back to NORMA, who takes a drink herself, and then hangs the gourd on its nail.*)

MRS. BIDDLE (*coming from house, closing the door stealthily behind her and trying it to be sure it is closed*). There, now, Hip, you're safe for another spell, until it's time for you to come home from a voyage and make your wife another little visit. (*Comes down steps, and suddenly sees ladies at spring drinking.*) Lud! I didn't reckon as there would be any one at the spring this early! (*Crosses c. and addresses ladies.*) Has the stage come? (*Curtsies.*)

MRS. M. (*turning*). I don't think so, Mrs. Biddle.

(*Rises and returns curtsy, in which NORMA also joins.*)

MRS. B. (*confused, but explaining in case she had been seen coming from house*). I was just lookin' in at the old house. It ain't changed one bit—on the inside. Looks sort of dingy outside, though, don't it?

MRS. M. I should think Miss Oggsby'd have the garden weeded. (*Crosses up stage, c., and looks over fence.*)

MRS. B. So'd I. Nothin' gives a place such a run-down-at-the-heel look as a garden all growed up to weeds.

NORMA (*seated at spring, working a cross-stitch sampler*). I can't recollect when Major Freeman's garden ever looked any different than it does now.

MRS. M. You are too young to ever have seen it different, Norma; but there was a time when that garden was the prettiest spot in the whole of Lilac Village.

MRS. B. Wasn't it, though! My, what pride Major Nehemiah Freeman took in his garden! (*To MRS. M.*) Don't you remember how he used to set in that there chair on the porch and direct the niggers working in the garden? My, what posies he had! Did you ever see sich hollyhocks, Mrs. Murray? I never did!

MRS. M. And he was so generous in giving the neighbors flowers! (*Crosses L.*) Why, whenever I passed the gate on the way to school, he'd hand me over all I could well carry! (*Sits L. on bench.*)

Enter R. MISS O., a typical landlady with corkscrew curls, carrying a home-made sign, "For Rent. See M. Oggsby," and a hammer. HAN. follows, dragging a rather good chair.

MISS O. (*to HAN.*). I told you not to bring that chair, Hannah Jane!

HAN. (*a poorhouse child used to being struck and hence always placing her hand quickly across her face to escape a blow when spoken to suddenly*). Yes'm.

MISS O. Then what'd you bring it for?

HAN. I dunno.

MISS O. Do you ever know anything?

HAN. No'm. (*Quickly.*) Yes'm.

MISS O. No, you don't, nuther. I often wonder what in thunder ever possessed me to take you off of the poor farm! There was a hull lot more I could have picked from, and a heap sight brighter, too, for all I know!

(*Turns up toward house.*)

MRS. B. (*at gate, with curtsy*). Good-evening, Miss Oggsby.

MISS O. (*with a grudged curtsy*). Good-evenin', Mis' Biddle.

MRS. B. (*to HAN., who crosses up L. C.*). Evenin', Hannah Jane.

HAN. (*glumly*). Good-evenin', ma'am.

(*Stands L. C., swinging chair on one leg aimlessly.*)

MRS. B. Nice evenin', ain't it?

MISS O. Fair to middling.

MRS. B. I was jest looking at the old garden.

MISS O. (*with a sniff*). So I see!

MRS. B. Sort o' run up to weeds, ain't it?

MISS O. (*shortly*). 'Pears that way.

MRS. B. Me and Mrs. Murray was just remarkin' as how it wasn't kep' up like it was when Major Freeman was alive.

MISS O. (*with her bob of a curtsy*). Good-evenin', Mrs.

Murray,—didn't see you afore. (MRS. M. *bows slightly without rising.* Turns to MRS. B., *who is still at gate c.*) No, it ain't kep' up, an' I'd like to know why it should be kep' up? No one's ever been here what hed a right to the place since the Major died, and that's been —— Land sakes, how time flies! It's been twenty years almost to the day!

MRS. M. In his will he left you something to look after the place, didn't he, Miss Oggsby?

MISS O. (*curtly*). Yes, he did!—but not to keep up no garden. I have my hands full keeping the house cleaned an' dusted, an' a useless task it's been, too! (*To MRS. B.*) Do you allow Nathan Freeman'll ever come back to claim it,—after all these years? I don't.

MRS. B. Never can tell. (*Crosses down R.*) Stranger things 's that have happened. (*Sits R. at spring.*)

MISS O. Yes'm, sich things have happened,—but not in Lilac. I've got plumb sick an' tired of seein' the place standin' idle an' doin' nobody no good. Why, there's clean linen sheets on all the beds,—and if you could see the linen and china an' pewter, an' silver ——

MRS. B. I was noticing it and thinking it a awful pity for such good things to be going to rack and ruin.

MRS. M. Downright sinful, I call it!

MISS O. Well, what's one going to do about it?

(*Cuff's HAN., and takes away the chair. HAN. retires and swings on gate.*)

MRS. M. If one could find the heir ——

MISS O. (*placing chair c.*). It ain't no use. (*Sits.*) The lawyers have tried.

MRS. B. You don't say!

MISS O. Yes, I do say. And what's more, I've hit on a plan.

MRS. B. Do tell!

MISS O. If there is an heir this side the grave,—and it don't seem at all likely,—she ——

MRS. M. Or he ——

MISS O. Or he, wouldn't like to have such a place fall to pieces from sheer rot, would they, now?

MRS. B. I shouldn't.

MISS O. That's the way I've figured it, and so last night as I lay awake thinking about it,—as I've done for twenty years now,—more or less,—at least every time that I've set up with

a neighbor when there was sickness,—or a death—— Well, as I was sayin', last night I decided I'd rent the old house.

MRS. M. (*in astonishment*). Rent it?

MRS. B. (*equally surprised*). For the land's sake!

MISS O. It might just as well be bringing in something toward its keep. It'd at least pay the taxes and assessments on it. (*Rises and goes up steps.*)

MRS. M. (*to herself*). A tenant in the old house! A tenant in Major Freeman's mansion!

MRS. B. (*to Miss O.*). But who is there in Lilac what could afford to rent the Major Freeman Place?

NORMA (*who has been interested, rising*). And they say it's haunted!

MRS. B. (*with a start*). Eh? Haunted?

NORMA. Why, yes, haven't you heard? (*Crosses c.*)

MRS. B. (*uncomfortable*). No,—who says?—What have you heard, Norma?

NORMA. Why, it's general gossip in the village. Some say that every evening, just at dusk, when the stage comes in, the ghost of Major Freeman can be seen sitting in that old chair there (*indicating the one on porch R.*) looking steadily down the road in the direction of the tavern. Looking, looking, always looking as if he hoped to see his son who ran away after he had that quarrel with his father,—just as if he thought that some day he'd come back home again!

(MRS. M. *looks very sad*. NORMA *joins her mother on bench L.*)

MRS. B. (*rising*). Mercy sakes! You give me the creeps, Norma! Why, if I'd heard that, I'd never have got up spunk enough to go into the old house this afternoon!

MISS O. (*who during the story comes down steps*). You went in, did you?

MRS. B. Yes. I knew the door wasn't locked,—I just couldn't resist the temptation to——

MISS O. To see how clean a housekeeper I was? Well, you found things pretty well swept up and dusted, I think, didn't you?

MRS. B. (*with a shrug*). Things was tidy, and rather neat,—but when I think of the way Mrs. Freeman looked after the Major and kept things shining—— (*Sighs.*) Oh, well, of course you do the best you can under the circumstances, and with a house of your own to look after.

MISS O. (*crossing down R., to MRS. B.*). Mrs. Captain Hippolytus Biddle, it ain't for such as you to pick flaws in the way other folks keeps house. Mercy! if I had such a lookin' kitchen as I've seen in your house!—I vow I'd lay right straight down and die with mortification! (*Crosses back to gate c.*) Hannah Jane, bring that there chair over here so's I can stand on it and tack up this here sign.

HAN. (*on porch*). The one Major Freeman's ghost sets in, ma'am?

MISS O. The same.

HAN. But, ma'am, supposin' his ghost should want it? It's near about stage time.

MISS O. (*looking toward MRS. B., who has her back toward her in disdain*). I'll squelch him, then. I've squelched folks with more flesh an' blood than any poor ghost ever had! (*Stands on chair. To HAN.*) Hold this hammer. (*Places bill against column.*) Is that high enough?

MRS. B. (*seated on bench R.*). Suit your own good judgment, Miss Oggsby.

MISS O. (*curtly*). I mean to. (*To HAN.*) Pass me that hammer. (*Takes it.*) Hannah Jane, take them tacks right straight out of your mouth, this instant! Do you want to choke and swallow them?

HAN. No'm —

(*Gulps and coughs as if she had, and looks scared for a moment, then grins as she feels it has gone down.*)

MISS O. I believe you do, you are that perverse!—Keep them out!—Give me four tacks and the hammer. (*Takes them and tacks bill in place.*) That won't blow down in no wind, I reckon. (*To MRS. M.*) How's that look, Mrs. Murray?

MRS. M. It's sheer desecration of the old house.

(*Rises and crosses R., sitting on bench beside MRS. B.*)

MISS O. Hannah Jane —

HAN. Yes'm?

MISS O. (*passing*). Take this hammer —

HAN. Yes'm. (*Takes it and starts down steps.*)

MISS O. And wait here — (*HAN. returns.*) What do you suppose I brought you along for?

HAN. (*with a sigh*). I dunno.

MISS O. (*taking HAN.'s shoulder*). Let me take hold of

you to stiddy myself in gettin' down off of this chair. (*Comes down steps.*) There, now. (*To HAN., who started to follow her.*) Put the old chair back in its place. (*Looks at sign in admiration.*) That looks businesslike, don't it?

MRS. M. (*sadly*). Too businesslike.

MISS O. (*taking chair from C., and moving it down L.*). Now I can set down and wait for some one to come along and hire it.—Hannah Jane!

HAN. (*coming down steps*). Yes'm?

MISS O. Bring me a glass of the spring water. (*Fans herself with her apron.*) Have you noticed how awful hot it was all day, Mrs. Murray?

MRS. M. (*seated R.*). Yes, indeed. Norma and I have been making a few calls.

MISS O. Well, if you had a houseful of men like I have, you'd know how awful hot it was, standin' in the kitchen over the fire all day.

MRS. B. Are you full now?

MISS O. *Full?* Well, I should say so. It's harvestin', you know, an' I've had to *cook* and *eat* for ten men this noon-ing! (*Takes gourd from HAN., and drinks. Then HAN. returns gourd to well.*) Lucky thing they get only cold vittles at night. If it weren't for that, I think me an' Hannah'd up an' die right off. (*To Mrs. B.*) You don't know what it is to cook for a hungry man, Mrs. Biddle.

MRS. B. Only the Captain.

MISS O. I forgot about him. He's home so seldom. Thank goodness I ain't married to no captain what comes home so seldom as your man does! Why, it wouldn't seem one bit like bein' married!

MRS. M. Didn't I see the Captain last night?

MRS. B. Very likely,—he's been home these two nights now.

MISS O. So Hannah Jane said, but I didn't see him myself. She saw him settin' in the window when she went past to prayer-meetin'.

MRS. B. That's why I wasn't out to prayer-meetin'. It always seems as if Captain Hip comes home on prayer-meetin' nights. (*Sighs.*)

MRS. M. Has he gone?

(HAN. *splashes some water, and ladies rise, then re-sit.*

MISS O. *motions to HAN. to stop it, and she docs.*)

MRS. B. Yes—this mornin'.

MRS. M. I was up when the coach went down.

(*Rises, and in a moment crosses up behind well, to L. C., where NORMA joins her.*)

MRS. B. Oh, he never takes the coach.

MISS O. (*curtly*). So we've observed.

MRS. B. (*slightly confused*). You see, the Captain has his land-legs on so seldom that when he does have them on he says he'd much rather walk home to sort of get used to them before he has to lay them aside again.

MISS O. (*in astonishment*). Mercy sakes! His *land*-legs?

MRS. B. Yes, his *land*-legs.

MISS O. How many pairs has he, I'd like to know?

MRS. B. (*calmly*). Two pairs.

MISS O. *Two* pairs?

MRS. B. (*quite self-possessed by now*). Yes, two pairs—his land-legs and his sea-legs. One pair he wears on land, and the other pair on the sea. I've only seen one pair.

MRS. M. (*looking off L.*). Why, I do believe that is Miss Long coming down the road!

MRS. B. (*rising*). I vow it is! (*Glances R.*) Gracious, but it must be late! She always goes down to the store just before the stage comes in with the mail.

MISS O. Hannah Jane!

HAN. (*coming C.*). Yes'm!

MISS O. You run right straight home and set the kittle biling.

HAN. (*starting R.*). Yes'm.

MISS O. I'll be right along presently.

HAN. Yes'm.

MISS O. (*rising*). Here,—take this chair back—

HAN. (*returning and taking it*). Yes'm. (*Starts R. again.*)

MISS O. And the hammer (HAN. *returns C. and takes it; crosses R.*); I won't have no more need of it just now.

HAN. Yes'm.

MISS O. (L.). And hurry.

HAN. (*sighing wearily*). Yes'm.

(*Sits R. on chair and waits further orders.*)

MISS O. Don't forget to put the kittle on,—poke up the fire,—and bring in some wood. And you might start settin'

the table; mind you don't drop none of them dishes. See if the biscuits have riz,—and—— Well, I'll be along before you get more than that done.

HAN. Yes'm.

MISS O. You might run over to Aunt Sally Johnson's and see if she has finished with the washin' and ironin'. No, never mind; I'll go over after supper myself.

HAN. Yes'm. (*Rises.*)

MISS O. Run along now. Don't stop along the road and waste time gossipin'.

HAN. (*sigh of relief*). Yes'm.

[*Exit R., wearily, dragging chair after her.*]

Enter MISS LUCRETIA LONG, L., carrying a tiny sunshade, and fanning herself.

MISS L. (*curtsying*). How'd do, Mis' Biddle? (*Giggles; curtsies.*) Good-evenin', Mis' Murray. (*Giggles.*) How are you, Norma? (*Giggles.*)

NORMA (*who, with her mother, is now near bench, L.*). Very well indeed, Miss Long.

MISS L. (*giggling; curtsying*). Good-evenin', Miss Oggsby.

ALL (*as they return her curtsies*). Good-evening.

MISS L. My, ain't this been a hot day? (*Giggles.*) This is the first time I've ventured out of the house. (*Giggles.*) I just set in the cool shade of the porch and read "Jane Eyrie." (*All look horrified.*) Oh, it's so fascinating! I adore Miss Brontë. (*Giggles.*) Don't you?

MRS. M. (*coldly*). I do not read such novels, Miss Long.

MISS L. (*giggling*). You don't know how much you miss. Why, if I had to confine myself to *Godey's Ladies' Book*, like so many in this town, I don't know what I *should* do. (*Giggles.*) But of course, each to her own taste! But give me a novel of Miss Brontë's, and a paper of peppermint candies, and I am just in heaven! Pardon me for being profane, but it is an ideal condition. Don't you think so? (*Giggles.*) Oh, but I see by your faces you don't. Well, each to her own taste, as I said before. (*To MRS. B.*) Has the stage come?

MRS. B. I reckon not.

MISS L. (*with a giggle*). I was so afraid it had come. I always count on getting down to the store to see the stage arrive. (*Giggles.*) It is the one bit of real excitement this quiet town affords. (*Giggles.*) In Boston—— (*Giggles.*) But there, I keep forgetting that every one hasn't had my ad-

vantages of travel and culture. (*Giggles. To NORMA.*) Don't you ever go to see the stage and the people who come up on it?

MRS. M. I hardly regard such a public place fitted for a young lady like Norma. To expose her to the vulgar gaze of strangers —

Miss L. (*interrupting with her usual giggle*). Oh, I keep forgetting. If I had a young daughter like Miss Norma—(*giggling*) well, I suppose I, too, would look at things differently. (*To Miss O.*) But you have no such excuse, Miss Oggsby.

Miss O. (*shortly*). No, I ain't; but I'm so busy lookin' after my men-folks —

Miss L. (*with a giggle*). Oh, yes, the boarders. (*Giggles.*) I always forget you run a boarding-house!

Miss O. (*shortly*). I don't.

Miss L. (*giggling*). Oh, pardon *me*, pardon *me*.

Miss O. I just open my home to a few guests.

Miss L. I see, I see—a distinction without a difference. (*Giggles.*) But of course — Oh, well, that isn't my concern. (*Giggles.*) So none of you care to walk down and see the stage come?

MRS. M. (*restraining NORMA, who shows she desires to accompany Miss L.*). Thank you, just the same.

(*The coach-horn is sounded off R., faintly.*)

Miss L. Well, I suppose I'll have to go alone then. I think I heard the horn. Good-bye. (*Crosses to wing R.*)

ALL. Good-bye.

Miss L. (*turning*). Perhaps I'll see you this evening here at the spring?

MRS. M. Perhaps.

Miss O. It ain't at all likely; I'm too tired for talking.

Miss L. (*with a giggle*). Oh, yes. I keep forgetting the boarders—(*quickly*) beg pardon, the *guests*. Good-bye.

(*Minces off R. giggling.*)

Miss O. (*c., looking after Miss L.*). Now if that ain't artificiality for you, I don't know what is! (*To Mrs. M.*) Mrs. Murray, the influence of that frivolous creature is not good for the young of Lilac Village! And as for considerin' her for the vacancy left by the resignation of the school-teacher!—I just can't see what the School Committee was thinking of!

MRS. M. (L. C.). You know such butterflies have a way of fascinating men, and I suppose —

MRS. B. (*warmly*). It's downright scandalous! You see if there ain't a scandal before the first term is over!

MRS. M. It isn't at all certain that Miss Long will get the position.

MRS. B. Have you heard anything?

MRS. M. Only that there is another applicant who has impressed the Board favorably, and it is just barely possible that —

MISS O. Who is she, have you heard? Not Miss Paisley, I hope? She's older and got more sense, and you can't say nothing against her moral character; but her teaching days are over,—or ought to be. What we want is a *young* teacher.

MRS. M. This one is young, educated at a very exclusive young ladies' school in the South—— (*Stops.*) There, I've told you more than I should, and it isn't settled yet anyway, and I don't even know her name. (*Crosses R. to spring and sits.*)

MRS. B. (*seated R. beside MRS. M.*). What you say has just whet my curiosity; it's like fat to the fire.

MRS. M. You will have to contain yourself for some days until the Committee meets.

MISS O. (C.). I shall just die to hear!

NORMA (*on bench L., working her sampler*). I hope it isn't Miss Long!

MRS. B. (*warmly*). So do I, Miss Norma!

MISS O. This won't do, me standing here. (*Crosses down R.*) I've got to get home and get the supper going. There's no depending on Hannah Jane. I'll see you all later, if I ain't too tired to talk.

ALL. Yes, indeed.

[*Exit Miss O., R.*]

MRS. M. (*rising and crossing L. C.*). I fancy we'd better go, too, Norma. (*NORMA puts away her work and joins her mother.*) Sorry to have to leave you, Mrs. Biddle.

MRS. B. (*rising*). I was just going anyway. I have tea to get ready.

MRS. M. Then we'll walk along a piece with you, if you don't mind.

MRS. B. (*joining them C.*). Glad to have your company.

(*They walk L., MRS. B. on left arm of MRS. M., and NORMA on right, nearest the footlights. MRS. FREDERICK ADDISON, a quiet, charming woman, comes in L., bows to the*

ladies who return her salutation coldly, MRS. M. unconsciously drawing NORMA closer to herself.)

ALL (to MRS. A.). Good-evening. [*Exeunt the three, L.*
MRS. A. Good-evening.

(*Walks R. C., turning and looking after the ladies as if not quite understanding the reason for their haughty air.*)

Enter R., AUNT SALLY JOHNSON, an old colored woman with a bandanna for a head covering, carrying a large basket filled with clothes and covered with a red table-cloth. She collides with MRS. A., who is looking off toward L.

SALLY. For de Law's sake, Mis' Addison. I done beg your pardon!

MRS. A. (*recovering from her start of surprise*). That's all right, Aunt Sally.

SALLY. I was just bringin' of your clothes over to you. I just done finish the ironin' this afternoon.

MRS. A. I was in no hurry, Auntie. (*Sadly.*) I shall be here some days longer, at least. (*Sits on bench R.*)

SALLY. I's mighty glad of that, Mis' Addison, 'cause dat means more work for me, an' I shore do need it these hard times.

MRS. A. How's Uncle Joe?

SALLY. He's done about played out, Mis' Addison. The rheumatiz has took him in de back.

MRS. A. I'm very sorry to hear that.

SALLY. He ain't able to do no work, no more calsminin', no gardenin',—I's hed to do it all myself.

MRS. A. That is too bad, Auntie.

SALLY. This freedom ain't what we-all thought it would be afore we got our freedom papers. I'd lots ruther be a slave workin' for Masser Freeman in dat dere ole house.—(*Turns and sees sign on house.*) For de Law's sake! When dat gone up?

MRS. A. (*turning*). What?

SALLY (C.). Dat piece ob paper.—(*Points.*) See—up yonder!

MRS. A. (*rising*). Why, I hadn't noticed it.

(*Crosses up stage and stands reading sign.*)

SALLY. What do it say,—is de ole house for sale? (*Tearfully.*) Don't tell me it says they's gwine to sell de ole house, sell Masser's ole house?—Do it say that, Mis' Addison?

MRS. A. No, Auntie, but it's almost as bad. It says it is for rent.

SALLY (*sadly*). So dey's goin' to rent de ole house to strangers?

MRS. A. That's what the sign says.

SALLY (*pathetically*). Oh, Mis' Addison, I've lived in dat ole house from de time I was a little gal brought up from down in Alabamie, 'til Masser Freeman died and left me my freedom papers,—me an' Joe. He was a good masser, was Major Freeman, Mis' Addison. I nebber hed no complaint. I got all I could eat, an' a warm cabin to sleep in, an' he nebber licked me,—an' now to see a stranger on de ole place,—I just feel as if life weren't wuth livin', no how.

(*Cries, wiping her eyes with her apron.*)

MRS. A. (*kindly, crossing down to her*). Cheer up, Auntie, it is not rented yet. Perhaps some of his own folks will come and claim it before it is rented.

SALLY (*calmer*). I sure hope they does, Mis' Addison, but it's been twenty years Masser's been dead, an' no one hes ebber come to claim the place, an' I hears they nebber could fine no heir. I reckon little Masser Nat died an' is buried away off somewheres. (*Reminiscently.*) He was a cute little feller, with his blue eyes an' yaller curls! I often see him in my dreams just as he was when I held him on my lap. (*Proudly.*) I raised him, Mis' Addison, an' I shore was proud o' little Masser Nat!

(*Crosses back to R., and picks up her basket.*)

MRS. A. I know you were, Auntie.

SALLY. I'll take these clothes over to your door, Mis' Addison.

MRS. A. Yes, Auntie. I'll be back before you return. I'm just running down to the post-office to see if a letter has come for me. I won't be long. [*Exit, R.*]

SALLY (*crossing stage with her basket, mutteringly*). They's gwine to let a stranger go into de ole house,—a stranger in Masser's ole house! [*Exit L., shaking her head.*]

Enter L., MISS ADELINE PAISLEY, an old maid who is still striving to be young and girlish, although devoid of the artificial airs of MISS L., engaged in ardent conversation with MRS. ROBERT DOUGLAS, who is youthful, overdressed and self-conscious of herself and clothes.

MISS P. Of course you think me foolish, Mrs. Douglas, but you have had the grand passion yourself, and you can understand the feelings of a young girl when the whispers of love come to her ear.

MRS. D. Oh, indeed, yes.

MISS P. And dear Perseus is so far away. He has to content himself with writing. But he writes every day—every day—rain or shine! Rain or shine, Mrs. Douglas! Think of that for devotion! (*They sit R., at well.*)

MRS. D. Good thing my Rob didn't have to do his courting that way. If he had, I'd still be plain Clorinda Hanley. He hates letter-writin'. Why, do you know, since I come here two days ago, I've never had so much as a line by the post?

MISS P. So different from my Perseus.

MRS. D. And me a bride on my honeymoon, too!

MISS P. (*sympathetically*). It is dreadful, I know, dear. Why, if my Perseus failed to write, I'd be that worried! I'd know something awful had happened to him,—that he was sick, or dead, or something awful!

MRS. D. It's spoiling all the pleasure of my honeymoon trip, and if I don't get a letter by the coach to-night, I think I'll go right back to Gordon Center in the morning!

MISS P. That'd be too bad, when you'd come up to spend a week with me.

MRS. D. I'd hate to have to upset all my plans, but not to get a single letter! Why, when Robert hitched up the chaise for me, he kissed me and said, "Stay a whole week and enjoy yourself. I wish I could go along with you on your weddin' tower, but I'm so all confounded busy with the harvestin' just now"—that's the worst of being married in harvestin'! (*Seriously.*) Miss Paisley, take my advice, profit by my experience, and never marry a farmer —

(*Rises and smooths her dresses, then re-sits.*)

MISS P. (*with conviction*). I never shall!

MRS. D. Least of all in the harvestin' time when you have to take your weddin' trip all alone!—I was rushed right off

from the parsonage to my house and had to swallow down the victuals and say good-bye to the friends what run in to congratulate me and Rob, so's to get here afore it was dark.

MISS P. I never shall get used to these new ways. (*Sighs.*) But if Perseus insists upon a wedding tower, I suppose I'll have to take one, too, like you,—only I hope he can go along, too!

MRS. D. It'd be a lot nicer to have my husband with me. but—(*sighing*) men are queer, and after all, perhaps I'm having a better time without having him trotting around at my heels, following me everywhere like a well-broken dog. It saves a lot of embarrassment, too, for I ain't used to bein' married. and I'd blush something awful every time that any one looked at him and me walkin' arm in arm, and by the time I get back home the novelty'll have sort of worn off, and I won't mind it so much, except the first time we appear out to church together.

(*Rises, rearranges her dress. Coach horn sounds off R., and quite close.*)

MISS P. (*rising in excitement*). There comes the coach now; we must hurry along.

(*They bustle R.*)

MRS. D. (*excitedly*). Oh, I do hope I'll get a letter!

[*Exeunt both, R.*

Enter NORMA, L., with a pitcher and crosses R. to well, where she draws water, filling her pitcher. MRS. JOHN JOSE, a tired Irish woman, hobbles in R. with a basket on her arm, and sinks exhaustedly at well.

MRS. J. Miss Murray, will you please be so kind as to give me a drink of water?

NORMA. Why, certainly, Mrs. Jose.

(*Pours water into gourd and hands to MRS. J.*)

MRS. J. (*taking*). Thank you. (*Drinks.*)

NORMA. You look all worn out.

MRS. J. I am dreadfully tired, Miss Murray. I've walked all over town to-day, and not a sale have I made. No one seemed to want any butter or eggs. They never do when the hens is layin' good. But when no hens is layin' and the cow's gone dry, I could sell eggs enough to make me rich!

NORMA (*taking gourd and hanging it on nail again*). That is like life, Mrs. Jose.

MRS. J. Ain't it, now !

NORMA. Is your husband working ?

MRS. J. (*in surprise*). Workin' ? Workin', is it ? (*Laughs.*) The very idee, Miss Murray ! I'd like to see the day whin he'd condiscind to wurk ! Bedad ! an' he leaves that to me ! Sorry I am that ever I changed me name to Jose ! All men is a caution, Miss Murray ; but some men is worse'n others.

NORMA. Have you stopped at our house ?

MRS. J. Not yet, miss.

NORMA. Mother was speaking of you to-day. We are all out of butter and eggs. Miss Oggsby didn't have more than enough to feed her boarders.

MRS. J. (*rising*). I'm going that way now, and I'll stop in. (C.) It will be a charity to buy something from me to-day, Miss Murray.

NORMA. Mother will take something, I am sure.

MRS. J. (L.). It's a lady yer mother is, Miss Murray, and you're an angel of a child ; the saints preserve yer both.

NORMA. Good-bye.

MRS. J. God bless yer, darlint.

(*Wearily and painfully exits L.*)

NORMA (*crossing and standing C., gazing wistfully R.*). I do wish mother would let me go down to the store some even-ing when the stage comes ! My, how I'd like to catch a glimpse of the great world, and see the people who come from so far !

Enter MISS L., R., munching peppermint lozenges from a cornucopia of paper.

MISS L. Why, Norma, are you still here ?

(*Giggles and sits on bench R.*)

NORMA. I came down to the spring to draw a pitcher of water for the table. I'm going now.

MISS L. (*surprised*). Oh, you use the spring-water on the table ?

NORMA. Always.

MISS L. (*giggling*). I never thought of drinking it, but I find it so good for the complexion. (*Giggles.*) I always sponge my face with the spring-water every day.

NORMA (*surprised*). You do ?

MISS L. To that I attribute my perfect complexion, my pink cheeks,—to that and salt. (*Giggles.*)

NORMA. Salt? (*Sits on bench L., pitcher beside her.*)

MISS L. Yes, indeed. Salt is excellent for the complexion. Bathe the face carefully, and then sprinkle liberally with salt and let it dry. Dust off the surplus salt, and spread a thin layer of flour over the face. You've no idea how wonderfully that works. Try it! (*Giggles.*)

NORMA. Why, mamma would be shocked! That's awfully wicked!

MISS L. Wicked? (*Rises; giggles.*) Well, that's the way one looks at those things. If the Lord gave one a pretty face, I think she ought to do all she can to keep it, don't you?

NORMA (*with meaning*). If one *has* a pretty face.

MISS L. Eh? (*Giggles.*) Oh, of course! (*Giggles, then offers candies.*) Have a lozenge?

NORMA (*accepting one*). Thank you.

(*Rises and takes up pitcher.*)

MISS L. Nothing is more refreshing on a warm day than a lozenge. If I didn't have a paper of peppermint candies by me when I was faint — They are such a luxury.

(*Sighs affectedly.*)

NORMA. Mamma calls them an extravagance.

MISS L. (*patronizingly*). Well, to people in *your* position — But I only have myself to think of, and I feel that I can afford myself the luxury of a paper of peppermint candies. I only buy an ounce at a time. (*Affectedly.*) They take me back to my girlhood in Boston. (*Looks R.*) Goodness, here comes Miss Paisley,—and I declare! if she hasn't another letter! (*Giggles delightedly and crosses L.*)

NORMA. She always gets one on the coach.

MISS L. Isn't it beautiful to be so admired?

NORMA (*sadly*). I never had a lover.

MISS L. (*sighing*). Ah me, what a world of pleasure lies ahead of you, my dear. (*Affectedly.*) I once had a lover. (*Sighs.*) He was so young, and so handsome, and so brave! (*Sighs.*)

NORMA. They always are.

MISS L. (*mock pathos*). But he joined the army. (*Crosses toward R., and pretends to weep.*) I never heard from him

since. (*Heroically.*) They buried him on the battle-field, wrapped in the flag! He died defending his country!

(*Holds her handkerchief to her eyes.*)

NORMA (*sympathetically*). His comrade wrote and told you?

MISS L. (*with a sob*). I never heard, but I know he did. He was *such* a hero!—Ain't it awful that the good die young?

NORMA. How dreadfully wicked most of us are, Miss Long.

MISS L. (*glancing up from her tears*). Why?

NORMA (*as she crosses L.*). If the good die young!

[*Exits L., with a laugh.*]

MISS L. (*thoroughly vexed, putting her handkerchief into her reticule*). Impudent hussy! I have no patience with these modern girls! (*MISS P. enters R., intently reading a letter.* MISS L., *in sweetest of tones.*) Good-evening, Miss Paisley. I see you received your usual letter.

MISS P. (*her mouth moving as she reads the lines, and not glancing up*). Yes, Miss Long.

MISS L. (*with affected giggle*). How devoted he must be to you!

MISS P. He is. I receive a letter from my Perseus every day, Miss Long,—rain or shine,—for more than a dozen years. Isn't that devotion!

MISS L. It is divine!

MISS P. If I should lose my letter, I believe I'd go wild, Miss Long. This letter from Perseus has come to be a very part of my being, my existence! It is all I seem to live for from one day to the next. I wait and wait for the coach to come, so I may go down to the post-office and get my letter from Perseus.

MISS L. Do you write as often? (*Sits R. on bench.*)

MISS P. Every day I put in the mail pouch my Perseus' letter. It is as necessary to me as going down to get my letter from Perseus. (*Kisses it.*) Dear Perseus, how I wish you were here! (*Reads it, moving her lips.* MRS. A. *comes in R., sad of countenance, crossing behind spring to C.* MISS P. *sees her.*) Oh, Mis' Addison, didn't you get a letter?

MRS. A. (*sadly*). No.

MISS P. I'm so sorry.

MRS. A. (*with attempt at a smile*). Thank you.

MISS P. I'm so sorry when any one is disappointed over not getting a letter. Why, if I was to miss my letter from Perseus——

MRS. A. Perhaps I'll receive one to-morrow. I've lived in hopes so long—(*crosses, and sits with sigh*) so long!

MISS L. I fear your lover is not so devoted as Miss Paisley's.

MRS. A. It does not seem so. (*To Miss P., who still is reading her letter.*) I see by your bright countenance that you received *your* daily letter, Miss Paisley.

MISS P. Yes, indeed! Always! Every evening when the coach comes—rain or shine!

MRS. A. You should be the happiest woman in Lilac Village, Miss Paisley.

MISS L. (*gushingly*). She *is*, Mrs. Addison!

MRS. A. I'm glad some one is happy. It seems as if this old world didn't have too much of happiness,—at least for those who live in Lilac Village.

Enter MRS. D., R., *all excited, breathless, rushing behind spring and down c., toward ladies.*

MRS. D. Oh, Miss Paisley,—Miss Paisley—have you heard the news?

MISS P. What?

MISS L. You are all excited. Sit down. (*Pushes her to bench.*) Here, have a peppermint lozenge!

MRS. D. (C.). I am quite out of breath,—I've hurried so.

MISS P. (*crossing toward her*). What *has* happened? Has some one died?

MRS. D. Stranger than that.

MISS P. Not eloped?

MISS L. (*giggling*). Oh, how romantic! An elopement in Lilac! Who is it?

MRS. D. No, no, not that.

MISS P. Divorced?

(MRS. A. *looks uncomfortable.* Miss L. *motions to* Miss P. *she should not have said that.*)

MRS. D. (*in horror*). Oh, no! Dreadful!

MISS L. You do not suppose any one in Lilac would be guilty of such a breach of good form, Miss Paisley? (*To* MRS. D., *and giggling with excitement.*) But what *has* happened? I am just dying to know.

MRS. D. There's a stranger come to stay in Lilac.

ALL. A stranger?

MRS. D. *Three* strangers.

ALL. *Three* strangers?

MRS. D. And such strange strangers!

ALL. Strange strangers!

MISS L. In what way are they so strange?

MRS. D. You never saw the like! (*Naturally.*) Oh, were you all at the store when the stage drove up?

ALL. Yes.

MRS. D. Then you've seen them for yourselves, and I don't need to describe them.

ALL (*disappointed*). Oh!

MISS P. I was so interested in my letter from Perseus——

MISS L. (*taking a peppermint*). And I was just buying a paper of peppermint candies.

MRS. A. (*to MRS. D.*). Did they come on the coach?

MRS. D. On top of the coach.

ALL (*in astonishment*). On top of the coach?

MISS L. (*delightedly, and giggling*). Then they are men! Oh, how exciting! Three men come to Lilac,—three new men!

(*Arranges her hair, dress, etc.*)

MISS P. What do they look like? Are they young? Pretty?

MISS L. I detest a *pretty* man.

MRS. D. (*smiling*). I didn't say they were men.

MISS L. (*in astonishment*). Not men?

MISS P. (*equally astonished*). Surely not *ladies*?

MRS. D. (*with suppressed delight*). Young ladies!

MISS P. (*who almost falls over in astonishment*). Young ladies? (MRS. D. *nods amusedly*.) Riding on top of the coach? (MRS. D. *again nods*.) Are you not mistaken? (MRS. D. *shakes her head positively*.) Was it not inside that they were riding?

MRS. D. It was on top of the coach, and they clumb down the ladder the postillion put up for them, and you should have seen the vulgar stares of the men loafing about the post-office!—I blushed and turned away my head.

MISS L. (*with much indignation*). The very idea! I know *one* who will not call on them!

MISS P. What became of them?

MRS. D. They seemed to be lost what to do.

MISS L. Aren't they come to visit some one?

MRS. D. (*shaking her head*). I think not.

MISS P. (*who can't get the idea in her head*). Three strange

young women come to Lilac, and not to visit any one ! Will wonders never cease !

MRS. A. Perhaps they are applicants for the position of teacher.

MISS P. (*positively*). They will not be considered !

MISS L. (*with much dignity*). I should say not ! And coming on top of the coach ! The very idea !

MRS. A. Did they look like teachers ?

MISS L. Were they good friends ?

MRS. D. They seemed to be *very* good friends.

MISS P. (*with decision*). Then they can't be after the position of teacher.

MRS. A. (*surprised*). Why not ?

MISS L. (*to MRS. A.*). Do you suppose any three women who were opponents to each other *could* be good friends ?

MRS. A. You and Miss Paisley seem to be,—and you both want to be the teacher.

MISS L. (*gushingly*). Oh, that's different.

MISS P. (*also with ardor*). We've known each other since we were girls.

MRS. D. But you should have seen them !

MISS P. Were they veiled ?

MRS. D. No, they had—at least two of them had—their veils thrown back from their faces.

MISS P. Brazen creatures !

MRS. D. The *third* wore no veil, but she should have !

MISS L. Go on,—go on,—you are so provoking !

MRS. D. Well, one is young and pretty,—the other is sort of pretty,—I think the men thought she was pretty,—but I don't like foreign-looking women.

ALL (*in astonishment*). Foreign ?

MRS. D. Yes, French, I judged. She spoke very poor English,—what I could catch of it. And the other—(*With force.*) The other was colored !

ALL. Colored ?

MRS. D. Quite black ! A maid or something. Both of the women, the foreign one and the black one, were very deferential to the first one.

MISS L. The pretty one ?

MRS. D. Yes, the pretty one. They treated her as if she was a princess.

MISS L. Oh, how romantic ! Just think of having a real, live princess in Lilac ! I shall go and call on her to-morrow !

(Giggles in excited expectancy.)

MRS. D. They wore the most gorgeous clothes ——

MISS L. Certainly, a princess should dress in accordance with her station.

MISS P. *(trying to get the idea straight)*. I wonder why a princess should come to Lilac?

MRS. D. *(intent on describing the clothes)*. A little ahead of the fashion ——

MISS L. They will have purchased them in Paris. *(Excitedly.)* Dear me, what shall I wear? This poplin has been turned three times already.

MISS P. *(crossing to Miss L., c., and examining dress in disdain)*. It is beginning to look a little foxy along the seams, too, dear. *(Pats Miss L.)* There, there, nobody will notice it;—you have such exquisite manners.

(Miss L. looks bridled, then giggles as if it were a genuine compliment.)

MRS. D. And the black one was dressed in the most extravagant style,—ruffs, and hoops, and ——

MISS P. I do not approve of dressing a slave in such a fashion.

MISS L. It marks the princess as having rather bad taste, I think.

MRS. D. You shall see them and judge.

MRS. A. Where did you say they went?

MRS. D. They inquired,—the foreign one tried to do all the talking,—for an inn.

ALL. An inn?

(Red lights are added to the white lights, and slowly during the balance the red is intensified until red alone glows, as if it were sunset.)

MRS. D. Of course, when I heard that, I stepped up and told them—her—that the only inn in Lilac wasn't such a place as a lady would care to stop at ——

MISS P. I should say not! Filled with men—and travelers!

MRS. D. And that Miss Oggsby took boarders.

MISS L. *(crossing and correcting, giggling)*. Receives guests, Mis' Douglas,—*guests*, and only when they bring references!

MRS. D. Well, I sent them on down to Miss Oggsby's, and they are there now, standing on the steps talking to her.

MISS P. Didn't she ask them in?

MRS. D. (*mild surprise*). That ain't Miss Oggsby's way.

MISS P. But she might entertain angels unawares.

MRS. A. Hardly, for she wouldn't take them unless they had references.

MISS L. (*still c. and gigglingly*). To think of being privileged to entertain a princess in one's house! I haven't very much room, but I am sure I could accommodate the princess and her retinue. (*To MRS. D.*) Do you suppose I could induce them to come and stay with me?

MRS. D. I don't know.

MISS L. I think I will run up and see. Miss Oggsby said this afternoon she was full up. (*Crosses to R.*)

MISS P. And with men.

MISS L. Harvesters, too!

MISS P. It is not at all suitable that a princess should go there at this time.

MISS L. (*giggling*). And I am sure her cooking is not to the taste of a princess. (*Grandly.*) A little nectar and honey, a few peppermint candies,—I know the taste of a princess.

(*Moves further R.*)

MISS P. (*crossing to MISS L.*). I'll go right up with you, Miss Long; and if you ain't got room, I *could* make room for one or two of them.

MISS L. (*gushingly, and squeezing MISS P. patronizingly*). That would be so sweet of you, dear, but I am sure I can manage. (*MISS P. looks disappointed.*) You might take the black one, however!

MISS P. (*shaking her off indignantly*). The very idea! I wouldn't have a black woman under *my* roof,—not if it was the very *last* roof left standing in Lilac Village!

Enter MRS. B., L., with a pitcher.

MRS. B. (*seeing the two going*). Why, where are you two going?

MISS P. (*crossing to her c.*). Haven't you heard the news?

MISS L. (*crossing R. c. of MISS P.*). A princess has come to stay in Lilac.

MRS. B. (*almost dropping her pitcher*). Well, if that didn't make me come the nearest dropping this pitcher, and it's the best in the whole township, and left to me by my great-great-grandmother, who brought it over in the *Mayflower*! I wouldn't have smashed this pitcher for all the princesses this side the Atlantic Ocean!

(*Crosses R. to spring, and begins to draw water.*)

MISS P. You seem to take it very calm.

MRS. B. Why shouldn't I? What've I got to do with princesses? When my father helped lick George of England, I—I'd have spanked any princesses if they'd been near enough!

MISS L. For shame, talking so of her Royal Highness.

MRS. B. This is a free country, and one woman's as good as t'other any day in the week. No princess will ever get me to clean her shoes for her.

(*Draws up bucket and fills her pitcher.*)

Enter MISS O., R., *keys in hand, followed by* FELICIA FREEMAN, MAMSELLE, FREEDOM, HAN. *Ladies all cluster at spring, and in wonderment and amusement gaze at new arrivals who are laden with handboxes sewed in creton, carpet-bags, shawls in straps, and a bird-cage partly covered with creton. FREE. wears the bonnet called a "Calash," and holds it in place with a string. It is much like a small buggy-top, and collapses when she lets go of the string.*

MISS O. I'm downright sorry I ain't able to put you up just now, but the harvestin' is on, and the threshers are here, and I'm plumb clean full up.

FELICIA. I am very sorry.

(*Ladies place their burdens c.*)

MAM. Nous sommes étrangères, madame,—we are the—the —

FELICIA. We are strangers.

MAM. Oui,—c'est le mot,—et nous sommes sans—sans —

FELICIA (*amused at Miss O., who pretends to understand* MAM., *and later gives it up in despair*). Mamselle means to say that we are alone, and we do not know what to do.

MISS O. I see.

MAM. Oui—oui,—c'est peu de chose.

FREE. (*to HAN., who has been pulling her bonnet down to see her pull it up again with the string*). You take yore hands offern me, you pore white trash!

MAM. (*with indignation*). You remove des mains,—your hand. How dare you touch la Miss Freedom?

MISS O. Hannah Jane, you stop annoying her.

HAN. Yes'm.

MISS O. If I catch you laying a finger on that—that person —

HAN. Yes'm. (*To FREE.*) I ain't teched yer!

(*FREE. sticks her tongue out at her. In a few minutes they are scrapping again, and FREE. beats HAN. with the tiny parasol she is carrying.*)

FELICIA (*bewildered*). Where shall I go? I —

MISS L. (*stepping forward and making a very elaborate curtsy, which is returned by the three newcomers*). I beg your pardon, your Royal Highness, but if you would permit, I —

FELICIA. Yes?

MISS L. I could offer you the poor shelter of my domicile.

FELICIA (*gratefully*). Oh, thank you. But my friends?

MISS L. I could take care of one of them; and the other, my friend, Miss Paisley, I am sure, would be glad — (*Miss P. leaves the ladies, all of whom have risen and are standing at spring, and comes forward.*) Miss Paisley, your Royal Highness, if you will permit me to introduce to you my dear friend, Miss Adeline Paisley.

(*Miss P. bows very low, and the newcomers return the curtsy.*)

FELICIA. I am very glad to know you, Miss Paisley.

MISS P. (*humbly*). Thank you, Royal Highness.

FELICIA (*who is secretly amused at the ladies*). Are you related to the Paisleys of Scotland, who make Paisley shawls?

MISS P. I believe so, your Royal Highness.

FELICIA. How delightful.

(*Giggles slightly at her little pleasantry.*)

MISS O. Hannah Jane,—what'd I tell you?

HAN. Yes'm.

(Desists annoying FREE., and then resumes again.)

MISS O. What do you suppose folk'll think? What kind of bringing up do you suppose they'll think you've had?

FELICIA (*politely*). You were suggesting, Miss—Miss Hogberry —

MISS O. (*with dignity and force*). Oggsby, ma'am. Me-hitable Oggsby.

FELICIA. Pardon me, Miss Oggsby. You were suggesting that it might be possible to —

MISS O. (*taking FELICIA'S arm and leading her up to gate*). To accommodate you in this old house.

FELICIA. I see.

MISS O. It has not been occupied in some time.

MAM. (*who has also gone up and stands on FELICIA'S left*). Miss Felice,—*permettez moi, madame*. It has not been occupy in beaucoup d'ans?—Combien, Madame Oggsby?

FELICIA. How many years, Mamselle means.

MISS O. Oh, yes, yes,—twenty years.

FELICIA. Vingt ans, Mamselle.

MAM. Oui, oui. C'est possible, Mlle. Felice, que la maison nous prendra froids! (*Shivers.*) Elle nous donnera malades à la mort! Je suis sujet à m'enrhumer!

(Sneezes violently, after making a face indicating its approach.)

FELICIA. Oui, je ne pensais pas. (*To Miss O.*) Miss Oggsby, Mamselle has suggested that if the house hasn't been occupied in twenty years, it is probable that it is cold and damp, and that we might become ill.

MAM. C'est vrai, c'est vrai, madame, c'est possible.

MISS O. I can't understand none of that gibberish, but it ain't one bit damp, and as for cold, it's no colder than the rest of the houses around here, and it has fireplaces in all the rooms,—even in the bedrooms.

FELICIA. Comprenez-vous cela, Mamselle?

MAM. Oui, oui, je comprends.

FELICIA. There is one other difficulty,—the price.

MISS O. (*deprecatingly*). I am sure you will find it quite reasonable.

FELICIA. I am not rich, Miss Oggsby.

MISS O. None of us are in Lilac, ma'am.

(Miss L. and Miss P. look resentful at this remark.)

FELICIA. And you say that everything is ready for house-keeping?

MISS O. Everything.

FELICIA. Dishes? Silver? Linen?

MISS O. Everything, ma'am, and all ready—even the beds made.

FELICIA (*surprised*). Made?

MISS O. Yes'm, and the kindling in the fireplaces even.

FELICIA (*more surprised*). How remarkable!

MISS O. All you have to do is to order what you want to eat.

FELICIA. And I have my own retinue with me. Freedom is a fine little cook. (*To FREE.*) Freedom?

FREE. Yes'm. (*Crosses to left of FELICIA.*)

FELICIA (*introducing her*). This is Freedom, Miss Oggsby, —ladies. (*FREE. curtsies with feeling of importance, and MISS P. curtsies, much to the amusement of Miss L. and the other ladies at spring.*) My little colored servant. You will come to know her better if we remain long in Lilac. She was my personal slave, but I gave her her free papers a long while ago. I couldn't bear to think of any one being a slave. And this (*introducing MAM., who curtsies, and to whom all the ladies curtsy, except Miss P., who just nods*) is my companion, Mlle. Violette Lescaut. (*Smiles.*) A difficult name to remember? Well, you may call her "Mamselle," like I do. It's simpler. Mamselle treats me as if I were a child and looks after all my wants. They are few, to be sure, but such as they are she attends to them and saves me all the worry and bother.

MAM. Oui, oui, Mlle. Felice. Je vous garde bien.

FELICIA. C'est vrai. You do take care of me, and the best of care!

MISS O. You come from—you are French?

FELICIA (*merrily, with laugh*). Oh, dear, no. I can't claim that honor. Mamselle is, that goes without saying, and she has acted as my tutor in that language and been my constant companion ever since poor mamma died, and when father was slain in battle and I was left quite alone, Mamselle comforted me and helped me to forget. I could not live without her. So now that I have decided to come away from dear old New Orleans to live here in the North among all you dear, good people, Mamselle and Freedom insisted upon coming along, although, in truth, I scarce knew where we should find the money for us all to travel so far. But Mamselle—(*playfully*) the naughty Mamselle —

MAM. (*with a pout*). Not naughty, Mamselle Felice!

FELICIA. Well, then, bonne,—good —— (*Smiles.*)

MAM. (*smilingly*). Tout juste!

FELICIA. Mamselle insisted that she had saved all her wages, and that she would spend the last dollar and follow me to the very ends of the earth if need be. And so we are here. But what is more to the point, our lodgment. (*Sits on bench L.*) I am perishing with hunger, and rather tired.

(FREE., who during the preceding speech has come down to this bench, and after several ineffectual attempts to manipulate her hoops, succeeded in sitting and raising her tiny parasol to keep away the sun, now moves closer to FELICIA, and pats her ruffles and fringe lovingly.)

MISS O. (*sympathetically*). Of course you are.

FELICIA. I am not used to such long journeying.

MISS P. (R.). Well, I never! You come all the way from New Orleans?

FELICIA (*smiling*). It is far, isn't it?

MISS P. (*in open admiration*). What a wonderful creature you are!—Were you not afraid?

FELICIA (*shaking her head*). No,—no. Timid? Perhaps, yes. But afraid? Should the daughter of a soldier (*proudly*) be afraid? What *could* harm me? Had I not Mamselle (*reaching up and patting cheek of MAM., who hovers above her on her right*), and Freedom? (*Pats FREE.'s hand.*)

MRS. B. (*who is standing well forward R., with her filled pitcher*). Well, did you ever hear the beat of that! Three women to galavant all the way from New Orleans to Lilac!

MISS P. Will wonders never cease!

FELICIA (*to Miss O.*). And yet there remains the question of price to be settled, and it is growing late.

MISS O. You might wait until morning to discuss that, since you are so very tired.

FELICIA. No, no, that wouldn't be businesslike, would it, Mamselle?

MAM. (*earnestly, as she distrusts Miss O.*). Demandez l'addition de la maison, Mademoiselle.

FELICIA. Oui, oui, immediatement. (*To Miss O.*) I must know how much.

MISS O. (*glancing at house*). Well, of course it is a large house, and all in fine order, and the furnishings are of the best —— (*FELICIA has risen and is looking it over again.*)

No, you can't judge from the outside. The garden *is* run down, and a coat of paint wouldn't hurt it none.—But *inside* —

FELICIA (*interrupting*). You see, I am not at all certain that I shall be able to do anything, and I might not be able to stay in Lilac if I didn't get the school.

ALL (*in astonishment*). The school?

FELICIA (*simply*). Yes.

MISS P. (*stepping forward, and somewhat icily*). So you're the young woman what writ here to the committeemen?

FELICIA (*sitting on bench L.*). Yes, I am Felicia Freeman.

(*The light is now all red, the glow of sunset.*)

ALL. Felicia Freeman?

MISS P. (*sitting on bench R.*). Well, I never!

MISS L. (*in astonishment*). Felicia Freeman! Is it possible! (*Turns to ladies.*) And I thought her a princess!

MRS. B. (*dropping her pitcher*). Mercy sakes! There, I've gone and smashed great-grandmother's jug! Heaven forgive me!

(*Stoops and ruefully gathers up the pieces in her apron.*)

MRS. A. *helps her.*)

FELICIA. You see now why I must know the price I am to pay before I can occupy this beautiful house.

MISS O. (C.). Do you mean to say you're Nathan Freeman's daughter?

FELICIA. Yes. That's how I happened to come to Lilac. I wanted to come and see the town where papa lived as a boy, and so —

MISS O. Is Nathan dead?

FELICIA (*with a slight show of emotion*). He died on the good ship *Constitution* in 1812, and is buried at sea!

MAM. (*soothingly*). Don't weep, Mamselle Felice, don't weep. Vous donnez moi mal au coeur.

FELICIA. I'll be brave, Mamselle, I'll be brave.

(*Replaces her handkerchief in her reticule.*)

MISS O. Felicia Freeman! Well, I never! (*Takes her arm and compels FELICIA to rise.*) Come right on in.

FELICIA (*protestingly*). But —

MISS O. 'There ain't no buts. (*Tries to make FELICIA take the keys.*) Take these here keys,—the door ain't locked,—Hannah—Hannah Jane——

HAN. Yes'm?

MISS O. Pull over that chair for me.

HAN. Yes'm. (*Places old chair beneath the sign.*)

MISS O. And you, Freedom,—you pick up your missuses things and lug them right straight into that there house.

FREE. (*protestingly rising*). But——

MISS O. I ain't accustomed to havin' my doin's questioned. You lug them right straight in as I say. (FREE. *looks astonished, but FELICIA and MAM. nod, so she tries to carry all the baggage in, dropping a portion, picking it up, dropping something else, finally taking what she can, and going up the steps of the house, placing the baggage on the porch.*) Now, Mamselle, you take the rest of the luggage and go in and light the lights.

MAM. (*indignantly*). Moi? Moi? Mais non! mais non! I vill not do it! (*Walks down stage L., disdainfully.*)

FELICIA. Please, Mamselle, for me.

MAM. Pour vous? Oui. But pour dat creeture—— (*Looks daggers at MISS O.*) I vill not!

(*Picks up the rest of the luggage and goes into house. While she is gathering the things, FREE. pushes HAN. off the porch with the air of ownership. MAM. exits into the house, and in a moment the lights shine through the door and windows.*)

FELICIA. And now, Miss Oggsby, are you satisfied?

MISS O. Not quite. Take these keys,—take 'em,—they're yourn. (*Forces the bunch of keys into the bewildered hands of FELICIA.*) I wash my hands of them from this day forward and forevermore. Amen! (*Goes up steps, stands on chair.*)

FELICIA (*at foot of steps*). But I—I—we have not settled on the price, Miss Oggsby.

MISS O. There ain't no price. (*Warn Curtain.*)

FELICIA. No price?

MISS O. Not to Nat Freeman's only child.

FELICIA. Yes, but still——

MISS O. Your grandfather left this old house in my care to be looked after and handed over to Nat if ever he come back to claim it, and if he never did, to whoever had a right to it,

and I reckon there ain't no one got no better right to this old house than Nat Freeman's only daughter, Felicie.

FELICIA (*smiling, almost with tears*). It sounds like a fairy tale, and I the princess!

MISS O. It does, don't it? Now come right on; Mamselle has the candles lighted, and you're tired.

(*She tears down the sign as FELICIA slowly mounts the steps.*)

Enter MRS. M. and SALLY, L. SALLY carries her empty basket. MRS. M. sees MISS O. on chair pulling down sign.

MRS. M. Why, what does that mean?

MISS O. It means that the old house has found a tenant at last! Help me down offern this chair, Hannah Jane.

HAN. Yes'm.

(*Helps MISS O. down, and places chair back to position on porch.*)

MISS O. (*coming down steps*). Now we'll go back home and sleep the sleep of the just. Our duty's done!

(*Crosses R., and exits.*)

HAN. Yes'm. (*Follows MISS O. off R.*)

MRS. M. (*standing L. C., bewildered; with emotion*). But who has,—who is —

MISS L. (*half-mockingly*). Her Royal Highness, the Princess of Dreams, has come home to her palace at last.

MRS. M. (*in pleasurable expectancy*). You mean?

MISS P. The heir has been found.

MRS. M. (*tremulously*). Then Nathan is not—Nathan has —

SALLY. Praise de Lord!

MISS P. Not Nathan, but his daughter. Felicia Freeman, let me make you acquainted with your father's old sweetheart, Marcia Murray. You will find her a good friend!

(*MISS P., FELICIA, MRS. M. curtsy.*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

INTERIOR OF MAJOR FREEMAN'S MANSION, ONE YEAR
LATER, EVENING

SCENE.—*A Colonial interior with door C., with velvet portières. L., door leading to kitchen, and down R. door into a closet, hinged to swing into room. Chair placed in closet so it will show to audience each time door opens. Mantel with grate-fire glowing R., just above door. Two Colonial candlesticks with white candles on mantel, a miniature of a soldier in uniform. Set of poker and tongs beside fire. Just before mantel, at an angle, Colonial davenport. Left of mantel, between it and C. door, large armchair. Small chair right of closet door. Left of stage, well back, Colonial table with cloth. Behind table, and on either side, small chairs. Down L., directly on footlights, a melodeon, with small chair. Cover on melodeon, music, and two brass candlesticks with white candles, one candle burning. Up stage, left of door, a pedestal with statue or vase. On walls a few colored prints and family likenesses in oval walnut frames suspended by red cords. Red light in fireplace, other lights dull, but with pinkish glow. One candle on melodeon lighted.*

Enter MRS. B., *at C. door, stealthily, carrying in her arms* CAPTAIN BIDDLE, *a dummy in a suit of men's clothes, stuffed, and with a paper face and wool for hair. A corn-cob pipe is thrust into his mouth and has an exasperating way of falling out to be replaced by the characters.*

MRS. B. (*glancing cautiously about*). I was so afraid I'd find some one!—Quiet as death!—I suppose Miss Felicie's dressing for the party. (*Crosses down R., and places* CAPTAIN BIDDLE *on sofa.*) That was a narrow escape, Captain! I thought Miss Paisley saw us,—but she couldn't have. (*Takes a key from the pocket of her dress and fits it into door R.*) Captain Hip, I'm afraid your trips home are almost ended and you're going to be lost at sea on this voyage! (*Picks him up sadly, and sets him on chair in closet, thrusting pipe into his mouth. Closes door.*) I wonder how I'll look in black?

(*Sadly.*) At my age it won't be very becoming. (*Locks door, and starts to put key into her pocket, but is startled, and turning sees MISS L., who has just slipped in c., and drops the key unnoticed.*) Oh!—Is that you, Miss Paisley?

MISS L. (*with a giggle*). No, it's me,—Miss Long.

MRS. B. (*confused*). Oh,—I thought you was Miss Paisley.—I saw her across the square when I come in. (*Goes c.*)

MISS L. (*who has spied the key R., gliding stealthily across to R.*). We're early, ain't we, Mis' Biddle?

MRS. B. (*nervously*). Yes,—yes,—I just run over early to see if I couldn't help Miss Felicie with some final arrangements. (*Goes further up stage.*) If you'll excuse me I'll go to her,—she's waiting for me.

MISS L. (*giggling in excitement, her foot on the key*). Certainly. Don't let me interfere with your plans.

MRS. B. I hate to leave you alone.

(*Watches door uneasily, and tries to make sure the key is in her pocket.*)

MISS L. (*moving her foot slightly to be sure she has the key covered*). Oh, don't worry; I can amuse myself, dear. (*Giggles.*) And if there is any little way I can help,—I'll be here and you can call to me.

MRS. B. (*abstractedly*). All right,—so kind of you.

MISS L. (*sweetly*). Not at all. Now run along, Miss Felicia needs you. (MRS. B. *hesitates in door undecidedly, feels her pocket, looks worried, glances toward door R., finally exits c.* MISS L., *as she sees her go, glances about cautiously, then stoops and quickly, giggling, picks up key. Then she runs up c. and looks into hall both ways.*) I wonder what this fits! (c.) There's only one door I don't know where it leads, and that's that one over there. Now I wonder if this key fits that door, and if it does, where that door leads? (Crosses R.) I will try it. (R.) Mis' Biddle was very secretive in her movements, and was quite upset when I unexpectedly appeared,—that's why she dropped this key. (*Places key in lock.*) It does fit! (*Giggles.*) And now to see where — (*Slowly opening with a giggle of pleasure.*) My! Isn't this romantic! (*Opens door and sees CAPTAIN BIDDLE in his chair. With one terrified scream she slams the door, and the key falls on floor. She stands with a paroxysm of terror shaking her frame, and uttering inarticulate gurgles of terror. Then she runs c. screaming.*) I've seen him! I've seen him!

Enter NORMA, C. She is struck by MISS L., who gives one blood-curdling shriek, and grasps NORMA by the right wrist.

NORMA. Why, what has happened? What is the matter?

MISS L. *(in horror)*. Oh, come away, Norma, come away. *(Drags her up stage, NORMA resisting and pulling in opposite direction.)* I've seen him! I've seen him!

NORMA *(trying to unclasp her grip)*. Be quiet and tell me who you've seen.

MISS L. The ghost, the ghost; I've seen the ghost!

NORMA. Nonsense!—Not really?

MISS L. Oh, yes, I have; and he's dressed in *pants*! *(NORMA gives a blood-curdling shriek.)* Listen! There's been a horrible murder committed in this house!

NORMA *(in terror)*. A murder!

MISS L. *(in awestruck tones)*. A gruesome murder! This house is haunted! *(Drags NORMA across R.)* The body's hidden in that closet! *(Seized with terror, drags the scared and protesting NORMA up C.)* Oh, come away quickly! I can't bear to stay in this house another moment! *(Drags NORMA out C.)* Come quickly! [*Exeunt.*

Enter MAM., who has been peeking in door L. during last few lines.

MAM. Ah, ha! I heered 'em!—A murdère? *(Comes C.)* That is for me to find out.—And a ghost! I have heered queer noises in the year we haf occupé this ole house that heve sent the shivères up and down my spine. *(Shivers with cold terror.)* But I hebe not seen no Monsieur Ghost I heered whispered about. *(Peeks beneath table and chairs, and holds her skirts as if he were a mouse.)* I vonder if he is in dis room? *(Each time as she peeks, she sucks in her breath and starts with anticipated fright.)* I do not find him. Now vere did she see zee Monsieur Ghost she spoke to Miss Norma? *(Sees key on floor R.)* Ah, a key? I see! *(Picks it up in triumph.)* That dore we never could unlock!—I see! Zee mysterie! *(Prepares to place key in lock.)*

FELICIA *(calling off L.)*. Mamselle!—Oh, Mamselle!

MAM. *(with a start)*. Oui, oui, Miss Felice. I come im-mediatement. *(Somewhat provoked she crosses up stage.)* I vill come back and investigate ven I haf finished with Miss Felice. [*Exit, C.*

Miss P. (*mysteriously poking her head around the curtains*). I was sure I saw Miss Long come into the house. (*Enters c.*) Where can she be? (*Calls in harsh, rough tone.*) Miss Long!—Miss Long!—No, she is not here. And where is Mis' Biddle? (*Calls.*) Mis' Biddle!—Oh, Mis' Biddle!—There is a mystery brooding in the air of this quiet place. Mis' Biddle surely was carrying a human form! I could see it was a human form, but whether it was a man or a woman—I wonder if that woman has had the boldness to make away with her husband? He was home last night,—I saw him myself shadowed on the window curtain as I went down to the post-office, and when I returned he was still there, and Mis' Biddle was settin' opposite talkin' to him at the table. But when I called this morning, he was gone!—I've always felt there was something queer about the way Captain Biddle came and went; now you see him, then you don't, just like a Jack-in-the-box! (*Crosses R.*) I will find them wherever they are. (*Lays her hand on knob.*) I suppose they're hiding the body somewhere— (*Opens door to step in, and suddenly sees CAPTAIN BIDDLE. She gives one awful scream.*) Mercy sakes! (*Bangs door shut and rushes c.*) They've hung him in the closet! (*In her excitement she drops her letter from Perseus which she has been carrying in her hand.*) I always knew this family had a skeleton, but to run on it unawares!—Why, I'm quite unnerved! What shall I do? What shall I do? I must get away from here at once; the very sight of that door— (*Shudders.*) Oh! It gives me chills to think of what is lurking behind it! (*Starts to go out c., and runs into Miss O., who is entering. She screams in terror.*) Why, Mehitable Oggsby! You've no idea what a fright you just give me! (*Sinks in chair L., beside table.*)

Miss O. (*in alarm*). Why, you look as white as a sheet, Miss Paisley. What has happened?

Miss P. Oh, it is awful, Miss Oggsby,—awful! I've seen the most dreadful sight! You'd never believe it!—Wait until I tell you *what* I've seen!

Miss O. Not the ghost?

Miss P. The very body and bones of the ghost.

Miss O. No! Not here?

(*Glances around apprehensively.*)

Miss P. Right here in this very room,—just now.

Miss O. No!—Where was he? What'd he look like?

Miss P. (*rising*). Miss Oggsby, there's been a murder committed in this respectable, quiet village of Lilac, and one of us is a murderer.

Miss O. (*in astonishment*). One of *us*? (*Protestingly*.) I'm sure it ain't *me*, Miss Paisley; I never harbored an unkind thought of any human being, let alone to plot a murdering.

Miss P. (*still mysteriously*). No, it ain't me, and it ain't you, but between us, Miss Oggsby, don't you think it strange the way Captain Biddle has been appearin' and a-disappearin' all these years, and none of us ever to meet him? And us like sisters to Mis' Biddle when he weren't home?

Miss O. I've seen Captain Biddle many times, Miss Paisley.

Miss P. So have I, Miss Oggsby, but did you ever have a *talk* with him?

Miss O. Not exactly,—I've called there on some errand when he was home and settin' in the winder, and heard Mis' Biddle talkin' to him.

Miss P. (*pressingly*). But did you ever hear the *Captain* say a word for himself, Miss Oggsby?

Miss O. Can't say that I have, Miss Paisley.

Miss P. That's just it. He's secretive in his movements, and I don't believe he an' Mis' Biddle was very friendly. How long was he gone away on this last voyage?

Miss O. He was home the night before Miss Felicie moved into this house —

Miss P. Was he home since? Think, Miss Oggsby,—think!

Miss O. I can't recollect that he was, Miss Paisley.

Miss P. (*with triumph*). He wasn't! until two nights ago. Now why?

Miss O. Why? Why?

Miss P. Yes, why? I'll tell you why,—because they'd quarreled and he threatened he'd never come back again, and then his desire to see his wife got the better of him, and he came home for two nights and a day, and then!—and then, Miss Oggsby, she up and did away with him, and his mangled corpse hangs in that closet behind that closed door, Miss Oggsby. Now turn pale and scream if you want to! That's what I'd seen just as you come in, and what's to be done about it, I want to know?

Miss O. (*in horror*). Mercy sakes alive, Miss Paisley! If that don't beat all! Why, if any one but yourself had told me

of such a happening, I—I'd never have believed it!—Behind that door, Miss Paisley? Are you sure?

(Crosses toward door R.)

Miss P. As sure as that I am Adeline Paisley. Open the door and see if you doubt me.

Miss O. *(placing her hand on knob, then releasing it)*. I—I—no, I ain't afraid, nuther, Miss Paisley. It'd take more than a dead man to scare me, but I am satisfied not to pry into other people's messes. *(Crosses c.)* Come away with me, Miss Paisley, and "leave the dead to bury their dead," as the Bible says to us.

Miss P. *(as she is led up stage)*. I wisht I had your mind for quotin' Scripture, Miss Oggsby. It's so helpful when one don't know what is best to do, and so comfortin'. [*Exeunt, c.*]

Enter FREE., L., carrying a tray full of dishes which she places on table. She is singing to air of "Last Rose of Summer."

FREE. "When the lasses rose in summer, left flowing all alone, all her lovely companions are all faded and gone." *(Speaks.)* If Miss Felicia ain't gwine to hab de lobeliest party dis evenin'! *(During this she takes the one lighted candle and lights the three others, then replaces candle. All lights go up bright.)* The most gullucious cakes an' marmalades! I made 'em! And tea! I's glad we-all come up from New Orleans and found dis fine house what Granpa Freeman lef to we-all when he died. But des some tings ver' disquietin'—an' dem talks about ghosteses about dis place!—But, law, I ain't seed 'em yet.—But I dun would like to know where dat dore goes to. Miss Felicia an' nie an' Mamselle, we-all've tried ebery key in dis here house, an' none of dem will open dat dere dore. *(Crosses.)* I wonder ef I could peek through the keyhole an' see anytings? *(Kneels down and places her eye to door R.)* No, dey's nothin' I kin see. *(Gets up and sees the letter dropped by Miss P.)* For de law's sake! A letter! *(Picks it up and examines.)* An' it's addressed to me! *(Joyfully.)* I know it's a lub letter!—Now I wonder what black-faced nigger had the audacity to write this here letter to me up here in de Norf?—*(Examines.)* P—capital P. His name begins with capital P.—Now dar was Peter Johnsing,—but he had a gal,—an' Porter,—an'—an' Jim,—an' Tom! Now this letter must be from Tom!—I wonder who he got to write for him to

me?—If he is askin' me to come down South an' be his wife, I'll—I'll write right back an' tell him I's *free*, an' I don't mean to marry no slave nigger what might be sold away from me up de ribber. I's got my freedom papers, an' I's free!

(*Crosses L.*)

Enter HAN., C., with a sponge cake covered by a napkin on a small tray or plate.

HAN. Oh, is that you, Freedom?

FREE. (*with a start*). Golly! You mos' scared de life out of me!—Yas, this is me, Hannah Jane. (*Sees cake.*) What you got there?

HAN. (C.). Miss Oggsby sent me over with some cake for the party.

FREE. We all hab enough cake without her sendin' none. Ah's been bakin' all day.

HAN. (*who keeps sticking her thumb into the frosting, and then licking her thumb*). Miss Oggsby thought you'd like a piece of her sponge cake. She makes such lovely sponge cake.

FREE. (*with dignity*). Ah makes lubly sponge cake, too,—just golacious. (*Grabs cake roughly.*) Here, gib me dat cake!

(*Takes it and sets it on table.*)

HAN. (*seeing letter*). What have you in your hand?

FREE. (*casually*). A letter.

HAN. A real letter? (*Reaches.*) Let me see it.

FREE. (*waving her away with dignity*). You keep yore dirty white hands offern this letter, chile; you'll spile it. It is a lub letter to me.

HAN. (*joyfully*). Oh, read it, read it, Freedom!

FREE. Do you tink I's gwine read you my private letters?

HAN. You're holdin' it upside down.

FREE. No, I ain't.

HAN. Yes you be.

FREE. I ben't. (*Stamps her foot.*) Dat's de way I read my letters.

HAN. (*laughingly*). You can't read.

FREE. Yas I kin, too.

HAN. Prove it!—Prove it!

FREE. (*pretending to read*). Miss Freedom! (*Pause.*) Miss Freedom!

HAN. What else, what else?

FREE. It jest say, "Miss Freedom."

HAN. Ain't you got no other name?

FREE. (*with dignity*). Course I hes. I hes the same name as Miss Felicia has.

HAN. (*laughing*). No, you haven't, nuther. You ain't Freeman. I know. You ain't nobody but just Freedom.

FREE. (*indignantly, yet hurt*). Yes I is, too!

HAN. You've got a awful funny name, too. Where'd you get such a name from?

FREE. My mudder.

HAN. She hadn't much of a mind if she couldn't give you a better name than that!

FREE. (*vexed*). Yes she had, too! Mammie was fine at pickin' out names. She named one of my brudders 'Postle Paul, and t'uther 'Postle Peter, outern de Bible, but when I come along,—well, when I come along the dogs had all the good names, and so mammie waited for a dog to die to give me a nice name, but no dog did die, and then when Miss Felicie give me my freedom papers, mammie up and said, "That's your name,—Freedom!"—And I don't tank nobody what makes fun of my name. It means a heap lot more'n your name. Anybody can be Hannah Jane, but not eberybody can be Freedom!

Enter MAM., C., key in hand.

MAM. Ah, ha, now I find out zee mysterie! (*Sees girls.*) Freedom, what hab you dere?

(FREE. *is examining cake at table.*)

FREE. A sponge cake wha' Miss Oggsby sends ober for de party.

MAM. Zat iss ver' nice of Miss Oggsby. (*To HAN.*) Tell her Miss Felice tank her with all her heart. Vill you not, Hannah Jane?

HAN. Yas'm.

MAM. But zee paper you haf, Freedom? Zat letter? It is for Miss Felice? Non? Give it me.

FREE. No, I won't.

MAM. You bad black child! Give it me, dis instant!

FREE. It is not for Miss Felice,—it is to me.

MAM. (*scornfully, snapping her fingers*). Bah! Who write letters to you, Freedom?

FREE. Tom.

MAM. (*gleefully*). Vat? Zat black man, Tom?—Down de rivière? (*Laughs.*) He cannot write a letter.

FREE. Some one writ it for him.

MAM. Give it me immediatement. I vill soon see if you tell de truth.

FREE. I will not gib it up; it is my letter.

MAM. (*threateningly*). You see! I tell Miss Felice on you—you see! You leettle black imp! I tell on you, I tell on you! (FREE. *darts L., pursued by MAM.* FREE. *escapes through door L., slamming it in MAM.'s face, who is very indignant, and turns quickly and dashes toward HAN., who is examining the table things.*) An' you, too, Hannah Jane, I tell on you,—you plottin' mischief with dat black chile. (HAN. *darts behind sofa, and keeps peeking over its back.*) You only come from de pore farm—pore white trash!

(MAM. *stands C., scornfully.*)

HAN. (*sobbingly*). I can't help where I was born. I'm as good as you are. You are only a foreigner, anyway.

MAM. (R. C.). Foreign? (*Indignantly.*) Me foreign? Bah! I nefer lef' La Belle France until las' year when I come acrosst de ocean to New Orleans! Bah! I'm no foreigner—I'm French!

HAN. (*protestingly*). You *are* foreign,—you don't even speak American like me and Miss Oggsby.

MAM. (*with much dignity*). I nefer desire to speak zat kin' of American! (*Crosses L., and picks up the sponge cake.*) Now you run straight back to Miss Oggsby and tell her Miss Felice is ver' thankful for de gateau, de ——— Oh, vat is it you call dis? (*Lifts napkin and peeks at cake.*)

HAN. (*gleefully*). See, you don't even know the name for cake!

MAM. Yes, I do,—only it slipped my memoire just now. (*Places cake on table again.*) Run along, I haf bizness to attend. (HAN. *exits C.* MAM. *crosses to door R.*) Now I vill find out zee mysteric. (*Starts to place key in door, and then.*) Zee door it is not locked! (*Opens door, sees CAPTAIN BIDDLE, screams, slams door, and stands back to it, clinging helplessly to the knob, petrified.*) A murdère—a murdère has been commit! (*Starts to go.*) I vill tell Miss Felice immediatement— (*Pauses.*) Mais non,—non!—I vill spy an' see who it vas

what commit de murdère.—“Murdère vill out,” is a proverb! —I vill vatch—I vill see—I vill get me a reward—me!

(She starts to lock door, but is interrupted by entrance of SALLY.)

Enter SALLY, C., with a basket of clothes covered with the old red cloth.

SALLY. Ain't dere nobody around dis here house to-day?

MAM. *(with start)*. Eh?

SALLY. I's been knockin' an' knockin' an' nobody come, so I walked right in here. What ails you all to-day?

(Sets down basket C.)

MAM. *(somewhat recovered)*. Miss Felice is giving a party.

SALLY *(looking about)*. Bless us, but de ole house do look grand—jest like when Major Freeman was alive. *(Sighs.)* Ah, dem was de days!

MAM. What haf you in de basket?

SALLY. I's brought back all de fine muslins and linens for Miss Felicie. Where I gwine put 'em? *(Picks up basket.)*

MAM. Wait—I hear Miss Felice. I vill ask her. *(Looks toward door R., shivers, hesitates.)* But no,—no—yes.—You vait right here. *(Goes up.)* I vill come back immediatement.

SALLY *(replacing basket on floor)*. I's feel at home here, Miss Mamselle.

MAM. *(at door C.)*. I vill be back immediatement.

[Exit, C.]

Enter MRS. M., C.

MRS. M. Why, Aunt Sally, are you here? It looks natural to see you in the old parlor helping to welcome the guests to a party!

SALLY. I's older, Mis' Murray, but I's do feel young agen standin' here. Law! Ef I'd knowed there's to be a party this ebbing, I'd shore put on a new calicer wrapper an' a clean white apron!

MRS. M. It would have been the finishing touch to the affair, Aunt Sally.

Enter FELICIA L., from kitchen.

FELICIA. Mamselle said you had brought the washing, Aunt Sally.

SALLY (*arranging basket*). Yas'm.

FELICIA (*crossing to MRS. M., who is R. C.*). Why, Mrs. Murray! (*Kisses her.*) I'm so glad you've come. I was hoping you'd come early so as to help me. I'm in such trouble.

MRS. M. What's wrong?

FELICIA. Everything! (*Almost tearfully.*) It seems as if Freedom couldn't get the things arranged, and the fire won't burn properly, and —

SALLY (*interrupting*). Law bless de chile! You just let yore ole Aunt Sally go right straight down dere. I knows how to make dat fire burn. I's made it burn long 'fore you wuz born, Miss Felicie.

FELICIA. You, Aunt Sally?

SALLY. Yas'm. I used to cook in dis house for your gran'-daddy an' yore gran'mammie afore she up an' died.

MRS. M. (*to FELICIA*). I was telling Aunt Sally it seemed quite natural to see her here again.

FELICIA (*to SALLY*). Auntie, if you'd only go down and help Freedom —

SALLY (*with much indignation*). 'Course dat chile can't cook! She don't know nuthin' but to put on airs an' lord it ober us ole folks. I'll show dat black gal her place, Miss Felicie. Just you lebe eberyting to me!

(*Goes to table, sniffs at arrangements, grabs up the sponge cake, and exits L.*)

FELICIA (*laughingly watching SALLY depart*). Isn't she the dear black mammie!

MRS. M. She is a jewel, Felicia. You ought to have her in the house all the time, and have Uncle Joe to help around. He's old, but he could be a lot of use to you.

FELICIA (*leading MRS. M. to sofa R.*). Sit down and let me have a talk with you before the folks begin to come. I have a lot I want to tell you. (*They sit.*)

MRS. M. Has anything gone wrong? You look worried. Tell me, dear.

FELICIA (*on right end of sofa*). Truth is, I'm having a very hard time to make both ends meet.

MRS. M. And yet you are giving this party to-night. Oh, what an extravagance!

FELICIA. It was expected of me!

MRS. M. You poor child, I never suspected.

FELICIA (*with dignity*). Do you think I would go around with my troubles written on my face for every one to know?

MRS. M. You have the proud spirit of your forebears.

FELICIA. I wouldn't be a Freeman if I didn't have.

MRS. M. Your grandfather, Felicia, ruined his own life, and that of your father, because he was stubborn and proud. Don't you do the same.

FELICIA. I shall try not to, Mrs. Murray.

MRS. M. You know why your father left home?

FELICIA. Not exactly.

MRS. M. Because of me, dear. I have tried to forget it,—but I simply can't. You look so like your father, Felicia. I loved him—I did love him—truly.

FELICIA. And yet you married Mr. Murray.

MRS. M. That is the way of we women. We hate to show our pride has been hurt. Take my advice, Felicia, don't let pride stand in the way of your happiness.

FELICIA (*brokenly*). You hurt me more than you know, Mrs. Murray.

MRS. M. I'm sorry, dear. (*Rises, and moves up toward c., talking.*) But if only you could profit by the unhappiness I brought upon myself, upon your poor, dead, dead father. (*Turns, and her eye falls on miniature on mantel R.*) Why, who is this? (*Moves and takes miniature in her hand.*) I haven't seen this miniature before.

FELICIA (*glancing over her shoulder, then turning her head away.*) That?—Oh!

MRS. M. I thought by the uniform it was your father, but I see it isn't. The eyes,—the hair—— (*At back of sofa.*) Felicia, look straight at me,—right into my eyes, and tell me the truth. Is this, is this your——

FELICIA (*giving her one defiant look, then turning away her head*). Lover? Yes,—that is,—he—he was.

MRS. M. Have you quarreled?

FELICIA. Yes.

MRS. M. When?

FELICIA. Before I came here to live—that's why I came here.

MRS. M. To get as far away as possible. I see. That's what your father did, too, dear.—Were you engaged? (*FELICIA nods.*) You gave him back his ring?

FELICIA (*nodding*). Yes.

MRS. M. (*sadly*). So did I, dear,—thirty years ago this night—in this very room—at a party. Your grandmother was standing there—your grandfather was seated in that chair, and I—I was standing here as I am now, looking at a picture, too,—only it was of a woman. I was insanely jealous. I believed I had a rival. I wouldn't listen to protests. I—well, I gave him back his ring and he—he was proud and refused his father when he told him he owed it to me to explain who the woman was—some cousin or other—I forget now—it doesn't matter. He went South to New Orleans and married your mother, and I—I married Mr. Murray. (*Replaces miniature on mantel.*) There, you know the whole story. (*Turns again to FELICIA.*) Now, dear, where is this soldier boy of yours?

FELICIA. I don't know,—he hasn't written me—he went away and joined the army, and—and ——

(*Breaks into sobs, and laying her arm on back of sofa puts her head on it and weeps.*)

MRS. M. (*sitting on sofa and pulling the head to her shoulder*). You poor child! You are repenting now. There, there, sob it all out on my shoulder. It will do you good. And then you will write to him, this very night, and tell him that ——

FELICIA (*quickly sitting erect, indignant, wiping away her tears*). I shall not! Do you think that I will be the first to seek a reconciliation?

MRS. M. (*sadly*). No, there is too much of the Freeman blood in you, the Freeman pride. Darling, if only your father could have swallowed his pride and written, I—I would have forgiven him. (*Rises and moves about sofa to mantel, looking at miniature.*) I stood ready to forgive him. My heart was yearning, bleeding,—and all these years.

(*Lays her head on the end of mantel and weeps softly.*)

FELICIA (*tearfully on sofa, looking straight ahead*). If ever Charles writes and says he was wrong, that he wants to be forgiven, why I—I ——

MRS. M. (*wiping her own eyes*). Of course you will, dear. —But if he shouldn't take the initiative and write ——

FELICIA (*angrily*). Then I'd never—never forgive him!

(*Suddenly breaks into sobs, and sits erect weeping.*)

MRS. M. (*at mantel still*). Freeman again! (*Vexed.*) And you'd go through life broken-hearted like I have! Oh, why will young girls be so obstinate! Alas, if youth only could have the wisdom of old age. (*Sighs.*) Go bathe your eyes and smooth your hair (*FELICIA rises and crosses to c., and MRS. M. comes around in front of sofa*), for it is almost time for the guests. Don't let them see that you are feeling badly over anything.

FELICIA (*after a moment of indecision, turning*). There is one more thing, Mrs. Murray, since I am confessing.

MRS. M. Yes.

FELICIA (*forcing her to sofa again, and sitting beside her*). Money.

MRS. M. Money?

FELICIA (*rapidly*). I had some money left me by poor mamma, and some from papa, and the school has helped, but there is no certainty that I will be reappointed.

MRS. M. (*soothingly*). Of course you will. You have given such wonderful satisfaction, every one loves you —

FELICIA (*interrupting*). I know. But I have my enemies, and they would like to see me ousted. And if I don't get it — well, the upkeep of this house is considerable, you know.

MRS. M. Your grandfather left enough money to more than support this house, Felicia.

FELICIA (*quickly*). I know. You've said that before, — every one says that, — but where is it? I can't find it. The lawyers don't know where it is. It has disappeared.

MRS. M. It must be somewhere about this house. Have you searched carefully?

FELICIA (*rising*). Everywhere, — everything. And you have helped, too.

MRS. M. Yes, I know. (*Rises.*) There's just one place we haven't looked (*standing looking toward door R.*) and I feel that perhaps there —

FELICIA (*C.*). Nonsense, Mrs. Murray. That closet doesn't harbor anything of the sort, — if it is a closet.

MRS. M. (*earnestly*). Well, if I were you I'd look behind that door anyway, and if you don't find what you are after there — well, then it's time enough to cry quits, but before I'd give up —

FELICIA (*crossing and placing her hand on door knob R.*). I've tried every key in this house, but not one will unlock this door. The lock seems simple enough, and yet —

MRS. M. (*quickly*). That is the reason why I pin my faith to the opening of that door. Why, it may even be a secret passage. I can't recollect ever hearing your grandfather allude to it. (*Earnestly*.) Felicia, there is a great secret of some kind hidden behind that innocent-looking door. I shall not rest until it be revealed!

FELICIA (*letting loose of the knob*). You persuade me to follow my plan and send to the next town for a locksmith.

MRS. M. I would.

FELICIA (*crossing to C.*). I'd have done it long ago if I hadn't felt ashamed of what the neighbors might say.

MRS. M. Never mind what they say; you send to-morrow.

FELICIA (*examining table L.*). I will do so, Mrs. Murray.

MRS. M. Now run and fix yourself up, and forget all your worries. Be happy to-night, dear.

FELICIA (*turning, and crossing to MRS. M., C., taking both her hands*). You have such a wonderful way of brightening me, Mrs. Murray. You are the most remarkable person I ever met.

MRS. M. (*tenderly*). My ability to help people has come as a result of my own sadness and suffering. (*Draws her head between her hands and kisses FELICIA.*) Poor lamb! Things will all work out well in the end.

FELICIA (*brightly*). You give me faith to believe that they will. [Exit, C.]

MRS. M. (*alone*). Now to my task. I must ask Mamselle the name of her lover and write to him to-night how bitterly Felicia repents sending him away. (*Crosses to mantel and takes up miniature.*) You are a fine, handsome, brave chap, a fitting husband for Felicia. (*Replaces miniature, and moves down, looking at door.*) Old door, what mystery lies concealed behind you? What secret can you tell? Do you hold the key to some story of love? What lies behind you? (*Places her hand on knob.*) Will the riddle ever be solved? (*Surprised.*) Why, it is unlocked! Is it possible it has always been unlocked? No—no—surely not, and yet—— (*Opens door. In horror.*) A human form? A murder? What does this mean? Could Major Freeman have murdered his son? (*Laughs as she looks closer.*) It is only stuffed! A hoax! Why, I do believe—— Is it possible! Captain Biddle! (*Laughs and drags CAPTAIN BIDDLE out. Places him on sofa, and thrusts pipe into his mouth.*) Well, this is too good a joke to keep! Captain Biddle! (*Seriously.*) No, I will not tell. If

poor Mrs. Biddle could find consolation in the stuffed likeness of a man, let the poor, lonely heart keep her secret. But I must get rid of him before Felicia returns. (*Laughs again.*) How? (*Sees basket.*) Why, if Aunt Sally didn't leave her basket! The very thing! (*Quickly carries basket to door, looks about cautiously, then places clothes on chair in closet, takes up CAPTAIN BIDDLE, constantly laughing, packs him into basket, covers with red cloth, shuts closet.*) And now to get rid of the basket.

(*Picks up basket and is undecided what to do, then sets it down in front of sofa.*)

Enter MAM., L., in great indignation.

MAM. Oh, Mis' Murray, I was looking for Miss Felice.

MRS. M. (C.). She has gone to her room, I believe.

MAM. (*starting up*). I vill go and find her.

MRS. M. She wishes to be left alone a few minutes until the guests arrive.

MAM. (*indignantly*). That Aunt Sally has took zee full possession of zee kitchen, an' she is bossin' Freedom an' me—something fearful! She acts as if we did not know how to do nothings, an' me—(*proudly*) I learned to cook in Paris—I know.

MRS. M. (*pleasantly amused*). Bless the dear old soul!

MAM. (*scornful sniff and stamp of her foot, glancing toward door L.*). Ole black cat!

MRS. M. (*soothingly*). Don't mind Aunt Sally, Mamselle. She is a good-hearted old creature. She used to cook in this house many years ago when Major Freeman was alive.

MAM. (*protesting*). But she boss *me—me*!

MRS. M. She bosses all of us, Mamselle. Just stay out of the kitchen and let Aunt Sally have her own way. Everything will come around all right.

MAM. (*with a shrug*). C'est possible,—c'est possible—but I do not tink so!

MRS. M. I am sure it will be all right. Aunt Sally has left her basket of washing here in her excitement over the affairs.

MAM. (*triumphantly*). I knew she'd forget someting!—I knew!

MRS. M. What shall we do with it?

MAM. (*crossing*). I vill take it myself (*picking up basket and going up C.*) and place zee tings in zee boudoir, and zee linene closet —

MRS. M. (*stopping her*). Wait until Felicia has finished dressing before you go into her room.

MAM. Certainement. (*With some pleasure.*) But I can put zee napkins, zee table linene in zee closet —

(*Starts toward door L.*)

MRS. M. (*preventing*). I'd stay away from the kitchen, Mamselle, and let Aunt Sally manage—just this once,—please.

MAM. (*with disappointment*). Oh, ver' well—to please you, Mis' Murray. (*Starts up c.*) I'll place zee basket in zee hall under zee table until after zee party.

MRS. M. (R. C.). That is the very wisest disposition to make of it, Mamselle. My, what a clever woman you are!

MAM. (*setting basket down; pleased*). I ees clevère, n'est pas? I come from Paris, madame. All zee femmes vat come from Paris ees clevère,—but I (*deep curtsy to Mrs. M.*), I ees zee most clevère, n'est pas?

MRS. M. (*smiling at the vanity*). I doubt it not, Mamselle, but hurry. I hear some one at the door. (MAM., *her head high in air, exits c., carrying basket*. MRS. M. *sighs.*) That is safe. (*Starts to cross to table L.*)

Enter Mrs. A., c., timidly.

MRS. A. Good-evening, Mrs. Murray. (*Curtsy.*)

MRS. M. (*curtsying*). Good-evening, Mrs. Addison.

MRS. A. (*embarrassed*). I don't know as I had oughter come, Mrs. Murray.

MRS. M. Why not?

MRS. A. (*with hesitation*). Well, you know—because of what's said about me,—because I'm—well, because me and my husband don't live together. But Miss Felicia was so good as to urge me—and I felt she'd feel hurt if I didn't come, and so —

MRS. M. You did the only possible thing, Mrs. Addison (*taking both her hands cordially*), and I hope you'll enjoy yourself. (*Leads her down L. to a chair.*)

MRS. A. One can't help enjoying herself in Miss Felicia's presence. She radiates joy and happiness everywhere she goes.

(*Sits L.*)

Enter Mrs. D., c., in evening gown, minus hat.

MRS. D. How'd do, Mrs. Murray?

MRS. M. (*turning in surprise*). Why, Clorinda Douglas ! (*Embraces her c.*) If I ain't glad to set eyes on you again ! Where ever did you come from ?

MRS. D. Miss Felicia sent for me to come up to her party. I just simply couldn't refuse Felicia.

MRS. M. No one can. You know Mrs. Addison, don't you, Clorinda ?

MRS. D. I met her last year when I come up on my honeymoon. (*Steps forward and curtsies to MRS. A.*) How are you, Mis' Addison ?

MRS. A. (*rising and curtsying*). Quite well, thank you. And you ?

MRS. D. (*c.*). Never felt better in all my life.

MRS. A. You certainly are looking well.

MRS. D. (*in protest*). Now don't say that I'm falling into fat !

MRS. M. (*smiling*). Dear me, you *are* plump, Clorinda.

MRS. D. So Robert says. Oh, he's such a torment, Mrs. Murray. Aren't men the most exasperatin' ? (*Turns and sees MISS P. coming in c.*) Why, if here ain't Adeline Paisley !

MISS P. (*hugging her*). Good gracious, Clorinda Douglas ! If you ain't a cure for sore eyes ! (*They kiss.*) I've been meanin' to write to you for ever and ever so long, but I didn't get around to it. (*Leads her R., to sofa.*) When did you come up ?

MRS. D. This evening. I'm staying with Felicia. (*They sit on sofa.*) Ain't she the dearest, sweetest —

(*Her voice dies out.*)

Enter MISS O., MISS L., NORMA, C., *hatless.*

MISS O. Thank goodness we ain't the first. I hate to come first to a party.

MISS L. (*to MRS. M.*). Where's Felicia ?

MRS. M. (*rising*). I'll tell her you are here. (*To MRS. A., to whom she has been talking.*) Pardon me, Mrs. Addison.

(*Curtsy, then crosses up c. to door where she meets FELICIA entering.*)

MRS. A. (*curtsying to MRS. M.*). Certainly.

(*Sits again unnoticed.*)

MISS O. (*at mantel*). Oh, look-a-here. (MISS L. and NORMA *join her*.) Here's a new picture. (*Takes up miniature*.) I wonder if this is her lover?

MISS L. (*giggling*). Ain't he fine looking?

NORMA (*on MISS L.'s left*). He's a soldier!

FELICIA (*who has been watching from doorway, comes down c.*). Good-evening, everybody. (*All curtsy*.)

MISS O. We was just admiring this here picture. He's a fine-looking man.

MISS L. (*sweetly confidential*). Who is he, Felicia, dear? A lover?

FELICIA (*evasively*). He's a friend of mine down in New Orleans.

NORMA (*enthusiastic*). He's awfully fine looking.

FELICIA (*pinching her ear affectionately*). Thank you, dear. (*Turns L., and sees MRS. A. alone down stage*.) Oh, Mrs. Addison, I didn't see you. (*Crosses to her, and takes both her hands warmly*.) I'm so glad you've come!

MRS. A. Thank you, Felicia. I couldn't resist your pleading invitation.

FELICIA (*smiling, and glancing about to see if all are present*). Where's Mrs. Biddle? Isn't she coming?

(*Ladies look uncomfortable.*)

MISS P. (*on sofa*). I saw her headed this way a long time ago. Ain't you seen her?

FELICIA. No.

MISS O. (*having replaced picture*). Oh, she'll be here. Mrs. Captain Biddle never misses going anywheres there's a bit to eat.

(MRS. D. *gets up and joins* MISS L. and NORMA, and MISS O. *sits on sofa with* MISS P.)

FELICIA (*crossing to c.*). I've got the loveliest surprise for you.

ALL. Do tell! I want to know! What is it?

FELICIA (*to MRS. M., who is at table L.*). Shall I tell them, Mrs. Murray?

MRS. M. (L.). As you like.

FELICIA. Aunt Sally is in the kitchen —

ALL. No! Well, I never!

FELICIA. She's baking the most delicious jumbles —

ALL. Um!

FELICIA. And frying such delectable crullers!

ALL. Um! Um!

FELICIA. Now what shall we do first?

MISS O. Let's have Norma sing.

MISS P. Lovely.

MISS L. Quite charming.

(She is standing right of NORMA, who is seated to right of c. door.)

MRS. D. *(at mantel)*. I haven't heard Norma sing in a year!

NORMA *(protesting)*. I can't to-night. My voice isn't in very good condition.

MRS. M. *(from her seat at table L.)*. I know you're not feeling very well, but do, there's a good child.

NORMA *(rising)*. What shall I sing?

MRS. M. That new piece your master taught you last week.

NORMA *(with a toss of her head and a pout)*. Oh, that!—Well, if you like. *(MISS L. has seized her right arm to lead her to melodeon.)* Will you play the accompaniment, Miss Felicia?

FELICIA. With pleasure.

(Takes NORMA's left arm, and the two ladies lead NORMA down L. to the melodeon. NORMA stands L., MISS L., R.)

MISS L. *(gaily)*. I will turn the pages for you.

(During song MISS L. beats time with her hand, tapping the floor with her toe, wagging her head, humming, etc., and persists in wanting to turn pages at wrong time, and FELICIA protesting and turning them back. FELICIA sounds the note on melodeon, NORMA takes it, and so does MISS L. Then NORMA sings: "Believe Me All Those Endearing Young Charms." At end MISS L. kisses her across FELICIA, much to FELICIA's disgust.)

ALL. Lovely! Beautiful! What a talent she has! You must have her voice cultivated, Mrs. Murray!

Enter SALLY, L., carrying a tray piled with crullers.

SALLY. Excuse me, Miss Felicie, but I wanted you-all to eat 'em while they's hot.

(MISS L. *walks across, takes one, and minces up to a chair* R. C.)

FELICIA (*rising from melodeon, and crossing up to table* L.). That's all right, Auntie.

(NORMA *sits at melodeon.*)

SALLY. A cruller ain't no good when it's got cold and the grease dried in. (MISS L. *comes over and takes another, laying the first on the edge of mantel near where she is sitting.*) Freedom an' Mamselle is bringing the tea right behind. They protested, but I made 'em come along.

Enter MAM. and FREE., L., *with tray with jumbles, tea, etc.*

MAM. (*to* FELICIA). She would have eet, Miss Felice.

FELICIA. That's all right. The refreshments are as good one time as another, and there's nothing like a cup of tea for thawing out a gathering of ladies and making them feel sociable.

MAM. Vill I place them on zee table?

FELICIA (*sitting*). Yes, put it here. That's it. Norma, will you help me pour the tea?

NORMA (*crossing to right end of table*). Certainly.

(MRS. M. *sits at table on* FELICIA's *left.*)

FELICIA. Mamselle and Freedom, you may pass it.

(*They do so, MAM. going to* MISS O. *first.*)

MISS P. (*to* MISS O.). I wonder where Mis' Biddle can be?

MAM. (*serving her*). Mis' Biddle not come yet?

(*Looks very knowing.*)

Enter MRS. B., C., *quite breathless and excited when she sees how late she is. Curtsies quickly.*

MRS. B. Good-evening, everybody.

ALL (*rising and curtsying*). Good-evening.

MISS P. (*to* MISS O.). I told you so. You watch!

MISS O. She does look guilty.

MRS. B. (C.). Forgive me, my dear Miss Felicie, for coming so late—but I had to stop and see the Captain off.

(MISS L. *snickers audibly and the ladies motion her to be quiet.* MRS. B. *goes down L. and sits beside the melodeon.*)

FELICIA. You are perfectly excusable, Mrs. Biddle.—Won't you have a cup of tea? (*Pours.*) Aunt Sally!

SALLY. Yas'm?

FELICIA. Give Mrs. Biddle one of your jumbles and a doughnut. Aunt Sally has been working herself to death to help me out.

MRS. B. (*taking one from SALLY, and biting into it*). If that don't taste like the ones Aunt Sally used to give me when I was a girl!

(*Takes tea from FREE., sugar and cream from MAM.*)

SALLY (*laughing*). Lor' bless de chile! Dat was thirty years ago almost.

MISS O. (*to Miss P.*). I'm just dyin' to see how she'll act when you tell them what you've discovered.

MISS P. (*nervously*). I'm so upset. It makes me squeamish to set here with my back to that door, knowin' what's behind it.

MISS O. (*nervously, glancing over her shoulder*). Mercy sakes! Are we settin' with our backs to that closet?

MISS P. Hadn't you noticed it?

MISS O. No, I hadn't. Do you suppose I could 'a' set here so comfortable an' cheerful if I had noticed *where* I was settin'?

MISS P. You always had your nerves well under control, Mehitable.

MISS O. I'm going to change my seat. (*Glances about.*)

MISS P. There ain't no place you can set but here.

MISS O. (*rising*). Then I'll stand.

(*Crosses up to fireplace, and sets her plates on mantel.*)

FELICIA. Aunt Sally, pass Miss Oggsby some more of those jumbles.

(SALLY, *who is near, serving* MRS. D., *does so.*)

MISS O. (*declining*). Thank you, no. (*To MAM.*) You may take my cup, though.

(MAM. *takes it and crosses to* MRS. A.)

MRS. A. (*placing her cup on tray*). Thank you, Mamselle.

MISS L. (*her mouth full of cake, and a cruller in each hand, rushing to MAM. in protest*). Oh, don't take away the cups; wait until I've told your fortunes by the tea-leaves.

MISS P. (*rising*). Oh, will you, Lucretia? Tell mine first. I want a *handsome* husband.

MISS L. (*looking at Miss P.'s cup*). Why, what do I see?—A letter.

MISS P. (*trying to feel for her letter*). You knew that—I get one every day from Perseus. Every day, rain or shine—rain or shine.

(MISS O. *walks to tray which MAM. is placing on table, and takes away her cup and places it for safety on mantel beside herself.*)

MISS L. But it is missing.

MISS P. I never failed to get my letter.

MISS L. That may be,—but I read here a *lost* letter. (*Crosses L. to MRS. A., who is seated at melodeon.*) Let me see your cup. (*Looks.*) Why, I can read a reconciliation. (*MRS. A. looks pleased.*) There is a letter coming to you. It has good news.

MRS. A. (*wiping away a tear*). You have made me very happy.

MISS L. (*crossing up R. to Miss O.*). Now, Miss Oggsby. (*Miss O. protests.*) There is a tragedy—why, yes,—there is a mystery of some kind in which you are interested.

MISS O. (*trying to take away the cup*). You shall not read any more.

MAM. (*who has followed Miss L. about*). I will keep mine eyes open. A tragedy,—an' Miss Oggsby knows about eet!

MISS L. (*who has crossed L. to NORMA*). Norma, there is a handsome man going to marry you.

MRS. M. (*rising and standing between NORMA and FELICIA*). I'd like to see any other what'd get the chance!

MISS L. With money!

MRS. M. Certainly.

MISS L. And a long journey.—Oh, there is so much I could tell you. Felicia, let me see yours.

FELICIA. I don't believe in such things, Miss Long.

MISS L. (*playfully*). You refuse a prophetess her due because she is of your own country, that is all! But I can tell

true things ! Come. (FELICIA *lets her take the cup.*) I see—I see a man—a soldier. (*All nod.*) A quarrel—a broken engagement—a ring. You are going to receive a ring, Felicia, a plain, round gold ring. Wait ! Here's something more. Money ! Um ! so much money ! Why, the bottom of your cup is just filled with money !

MRS. M. (*to FELICIA*). Isn't that lovely ?

FELICIA (*sadly*). I wish it were true.

MRS. M. (*in FELICIA'S ear*). The ring or the money,—which ?

FELICIA (*smiling*). Both.

MISS L. (*who has passed down, whispered to MRS. D. something which made her giggle*). Now, Mis' Biddle.

MRS. B. (*seated L.*). I don't believe in such nonsense.

MISS L. Oh, come, every one else has.

MISS P. (*to MISS O.*). What'd I tell you ? She's afraid to have her fortune told.

MRS. B. (*to MISS L.*). I won't be party to no such pack of lies.

MISS L. (*pretending indignation*). My fortunes are true. You try me and see.

MRS. B. No.

ALL. Oh, do, Mis' Biddle. Please do. Every one has ! Please !

MISS O. Maybe she'll tell you something about the Captain.

(*Looks at MISS P. knowingly.*)

MRS. B. (*with a start*). Eh ? I don't care to hear anything about Captain Biddle. I know all I want to about him, and more, too !

MISS P. (*to MISS O.*). What'd I tell you ? She knows more than she wants to about him. You'll see.

MRS. B. (*as all are urging*). Well, since you all insist,—(*handing cup to MISS L.*) but I don't put no stock in no such nonsense.

MISS L. (*dramatically c.*). Oh ! Take away your cup, Mis' Biddle,—take it away !

ALL (*interested*). What is it ? What is it ?

MISS L. No,—no—I mustn't read it—I mustn't.

ALL. Oh, do—do—please do !

MISS L. I mustn't—I mustn't.

ALL (*disappointed*). Oh !

MRS. B. (*angrily and perplexed, handing back cup*). Here, take it. I ain't done nothing to be ashamed of having you read from them tea-leaves.

MISS L. (*taking cup*). Well, if you insist. (*Looks within*.) I see the shadow of a crime.

ALL. Oh!

MRS. B. (*trying to be calm*). A crime?

MISS L. A dark mystery —

MRS. B. Eh?

MISS L. In fact,—a murder!

ALL. Oh! A murder!

MISS P. (*to Miss O.*). See how guilty she's looking?

MISS L. (*continuing*). And the body is not far from here, —in this very room! (*General horror.*)

MRS. B. (*jumping up angrily, snatching cup and smashing it to the ground, and then snatching saucer and breaking it, too*). That's a lie, Lucretia Long, an infamous lie! (*She goes at Miss L., as if she'd scratch her eyes, and FELICIA hurries toward them.*) You would ruin my reputation. What have I ever done to you that you should stand there and accuse me of a murder, and of concealing the body in this house?

FELICIA (*C., to Mrs. B.*). I am sorry this should have happened, Mrs. Biddle, very sorry. Miss Long, what possessed you to tell her such things?

MISS L. (*R., with toss of her head in self-justification*). I only read what was in the cup.

(*Miss P. and Miss O. join her and show they believe she did just right.*)

FELICIA (*soothingly*). There, there, we don't believe it; none of us believe it. (*Mrs. A. has moved Mrs. B.'s chair about L. C.*) Sit down and try to calm yourself. (*Mrs. B. sits, weeping. Mrs. A. fans her.*) Freedom, give Mrs. Biddle some more tea.

FREE. (*coming down with tea to Mrs. B.*). Yas'm.

MRS. B. (*waving her away*). I don't want it!—I can't bear the sight of a cup of tea—never again.

MISS P. (*suddenly, having felt in her reticule*). Oh, I've lost my letter—my letter from Perseus. Has any one here seen my letter? (*General excitement of every one searching.*) Where is my letter? I always carry it in my reticule.

MAM. (*C.*). I seen it, Miss Paisley. That leetle black imp, Freedom, she had a letter —

MISS P. (*to FREE., C.*). Where is it, Freedom? Where is it?

FREE. (*sullenly*). I ain't seed yore old letter.

MAM. Ah, ha, don't tell lies, Freedom.

FREE. I ain't seed it.

MAM. I cotched you reading it this evening.

FREE. That was *my* letter. That was my letter from my lubber away down Souf!

FELICIA (*to FREE.*). Bring me the letter, Freedom. I can quickly tell. (*FREE. starts to answer back.*) Don't stop to argue. If it is yours that is all right, but if it isn't, it must be restored to the person to whom it belongs.

[*Exit FREE., L., glumly.*]

Enter SALLY, C., with basket.

SALLY. I's gwine along home, Miss Felicie, if dey's nuthin' more I kin do fur yer.

FELICIA. Nothing, Aunt Sally, thank you. I very much appreciate all that you have done for me to make this party such a success.

SALLY. Where'll yer have me put these here clothes, Miss Felicie? I found them in the hall under the table.

FELICIA. Why — Oh, you might put them away for her, if you will, Mamselle.

MAM. (*conducting SALLY up C.*). Certainement. Bring the basket this way, Aunt Sally.

MRS. M. (*nervously stopping them*). No. — Aunt Sally, can't you leave the basket until to-morrow? (*To FELICIA.*) It will be only a nuisance to put the clothes away to-night, Felicia. Let her leave the basket.

FELICIA (*L. C.*). Why, yes, that will do as well. You may leave the basket in the hall, Auntie.

SALLY (*protestingly*). But Ah needs the basket to put other folks' clothes into, Miss Felicie.

FELICIA (*hesitating what to do*). Well, I guess we'll have to —

MAM. (*with a triumphant gleam*). I vill put dem in dis closet, Miss Felice. (*Crosses R.*)

FELICIA (*not seeing the various ladies shudder and draw away from the door*). You know we can't open that door, Mamselle. We never have since we lived in this house.

(*MRS. B. looks relieved.*)

MAM. I know, Miss Felice, but I—I have found zee key!

(Shows it in triumph.)

FELICIA. Where *did* you find it?

MAM. On zee floor. *(Points.)* There.

FELICIA. How strange!

MRS. B. *(rising)*. It is getting late, Miss Felicie, and I really must go.

FELICIA. Oh, don't hurry. It isn't nine yet, surely.

MRS. B. *(nervously)*. It is dark up my way, and no one goes up that way; I really ought to,—I've had a lovely evening——

MISS P. *(preventing her exit)*. Don't hurry, Mis' Biddle. We're having such a lovely time.

MISS O. *(also blocking the way)*. Me an' Hannah Jane will walk a piece with you, Mis' Biddle, if you'll wait a little while. Hannah's coming after me. She's in the kitchen now, most like, with Freedom.

MRS. M. *(also preventing)*. Do stay, Mis' Biddle. If you go every one will feel it is time to leave.

MAM. *(throwing open the door in triumph)*. Look, Miss Felice. The key opens the door.

(All crowd for a peek, and with various phases of emotion.

MRS. B. looks as if she'd faint, sees the closet empty, and sinks into the chair L. C.)

FELICIA *(pleased)*. The mystery is solved!

MRS. M. *(crossing to closet)*. You see, Felicia, there is no secret stair, nothing but a closet.

MISS O. *(aghast, to MISS P.; they are L. together)*. And empty!

MISS P. Now who do you suppose made away with the body?

FELICIA *(crossing R.)*. Bring the clothes over here, Aunt Sally. We'll put them on this chair until morning.

(SALLY brings basket down R. C.)

MISS O. *(to MRS. B.)*. Why, Mis' Biddle, you are trembling all over. What on earth ails you?

MRS. B. Nothing. It's the warmth of the room. It is close here.

MISS O. I hadn't noticed it. Mrs. Addison, will you open that door, please? Mis' Biddle is feeling faint.

(MRS. A. *opens door* L. MISS L. *comes down and offers* MRS. B. *a peppermint, which she takes.*)

MAM. (R., *at closet*). Why, Miss Felice, there are clothes here already!

FELICIA. I suppose it is grandmamma's linen closet.

MAM. (*showing clothes*). Mais non,—zey are your clothes—your clothes, Miss Felice.

FELICIA. I don't understand. (*Examines.*) So they are!

MAM. Aunt Sally, what have you in that basket?

SALLY (*protesting*). I swear to goodness I brung Miss Felicie's clothes in this here basket, an' no one hes teched 'em.

MRS. M. Some one must have put the clothes into that closet while you were in the kitchen, Auntie. You left the basket here in the parlor in your excitement.

SALLY (*throwing up her hands in horror*). 'Clare to goodness, so I did!

MRS. M. Take the basket home with you, then.

SALLY (*picking it up*). Dis basket is too hebby to tote all de ways home. I's gwine to find out what's in it.

(*Sets it down quickly and goes to remove cover, but MRS. M. prevents.*)

MRS. M. (*pleasantly*). I think you'll find that Miss Felicia put something nice in it for you, Auntie. Let it be a surprise to you and Uncle Joe when you get home.

MISS O. (L., *to Miss P.*). I reckon she give my sponge-cake to Aunt Sally. I ain't sot eyes on it since I come here, and I've been looking for it, too.

SALLY (*to FELICIA*). I thank you for what you've give me, Miss Felicie. (*Picks up basket and shakes her head as she walks c.*) But it do feel uncommonly hebby for cake!

MRS. M. (*laughingly glancing toward MISS O., who tosses her head in disdain*). Some cake is heavier than other, Aunt Sally.

SALLY (*mystified*). Dis is too hebby for cake—or bread—even if dat wuthless colored chile make it. I's gwine fine out afore I move anudder step futher!

(*Sets down basket, and before MRS. M. can prevent snatches off cover and with a scream dumps CAPTAIN BIDDLE at feet of MRS. B. All scream, then laugh. MRS. B. has hysterics. SALLY braces CAPTAIN BIDDLE against the*

basket, and sticks his pipe in his mouth, and stands off, hands on hips, laughing.)

MRS. B. (*as CAPTAIN BIDDLE comes out*). Oh, it's Captain Biddle! How come he in the basket?

FELICIA (*mystified*). Captain Biddle?

MRS. B. (*in hysterics*). Yes, yes—he was only a stuffed man!

MRS. D. That's all most men are, Mis' Biddle.

MRS. B. When I was young, I loved a sailor, but he went away. You'll remember my engagement?

ALL. Yes—yes!

MRS. B. I couldn't bear to let you know my engagement was broken off after all the preparations was made for our marriage, and you'd all give me such elegant presents, and I hated so to send them back, I was so attached to them all,—so I went away and come back and says I was married, and I wore this gold ring I bought when I went away. And then because you kept askin' and askin' why Captain Biddle didn't come home, I just up and stuffed a man to look like a captain, and sot him in the winders every so often, and told you a story about his coming home. There never was no Captain Biddle. But you-all'd never knowed it if I hadn't 'a' lost that key this evenin' when I was locking him in the closet.

MISS P. And if I hadn't seen yer lugging that figger into the house!

MRS. B. Then you did see me, Adeline Paisley?

MISS P. I did that, and followed you in to see what you were going to do with the body. I believed you had murdered the Captain.

MRS. B. (*rising*). That is where Miss Long got the ideas she read in them tea-leaves. I shall never, never forgive any of you. (*Weeps again.*)

MISS P. You can thank me, Maria Biddle, for bringing to nought your life of deception. You are a free woman once more.

MRS. BIDDLE (*helplessly*). But what shall I do? I've called myself Mrs. Captain Maria Hippolytus Biddle so many years,—I—I'm ashamed to face everybody with a new name. What shall I do—what shall I do? (*Weeps violently.*)

FELICIA (*sympathetically*). There never was a Captain Biddle, Mrs. Biddle?

MRS. B. Never.

FELICIA. Where did you get the name?

MRS. B. I took the name Hippolytus outern the Mythology what always lays on the table underneath the family Bible. It sounded big and bad, and was hard to spell (*sobbing*); it took me a week to learn how to spell it,—and it was so hard to remember that I shortened it to Hip for short. The Biddle I found in the back of the dictionary; he was a astronomer, and as a captain is a sort of a star-gazer anyhow, I decided the two names went well together, so I just called myself Mrs. Captain Maria Hippolytus Biddle. (*Weeps. Sits L.*)

FELICIA (*soothingly*). There, there, it will all come out well. Mamselle, gather up the poor remains of the Captain, and put him back in the closet where he has reposed these many years. It is a fitting interment for the intrepid soul. (*MAM. drags CAPTAIN BIDDLE to closet, places him on the chair, and shuts the door.*) Aunt Sally, you go down into the kitchen and fill your basket with all the good things you and Uncle Joe can eat.—There's a sponge-cake there, quite untouched. Take that, too.

SALLY (*picking up basket and cover*). Thank yer, Miss Felicie. [*Exit, L.*]

MISS O. (*to Miss P.*). I told you Aunt Sally would get my sponge-cake! That's what one gets for doing a good turn to a neighbor!

Enter FREE., L.

FREE. Here's dat letter, Miss Felicie.

FELICIA. Give it to me, Freedom. (*Takes letter.*)

MISS P. (*in horror*). Dear, dear, there's my letter now!

(Goes down to corner R.)

FELICIA (*reading*). "My dear Madam:—I beg to inform you that your order for love charms was received in due season, and I am sending you the desired article by this post. Very truly yours, Perseus MacCardle." Why, Freedom, do you mean to tell me you wrote and sent money for a love charm? I am ashamed of you.

FREE. (*protesting*). No, Miss Felicie, no.

FELICIA. Then how came you by this letter?

FREE. I thought it was a lub letter,—I—I picked it up ober there on de floor just now.

(HAN. looks in door C., and giggles.)

FELICIA. Who could have dropped this? (*Looks at outside.*) Where is the envelope?

FREE. Ah swear to goodness I lost it somewhere.

HAN. (*stepping in c. and passing to FELICIA an envelope.*) Here it is, Miss Felicie; I found it in the hall.

(FREE. *slaps HAN., who runs out c. pursued by the enraged FREE.*)

FELICIA. Thank you. (*Examines envelope.*) "Miss Adeline Paisley, Lilac Village." (*Passes letter.*) Miss Paisley, I think this letter must belong to you.

MISS P. (*crying mad*). I don't want it.

FELICIA (*trying to make her take it*). It is yours. I have no use for it.

MISS P. (*sobbingly*). You've gone and undone all my little romance of thirty years. No one will ever believe in my Perseus again. I am so unhappy. (*Weeps.*)

FELICIA. But if Perseus has been accustomed to write to you every day, rain or shine, for thirty years, why, this business letter can't make any difference in his affections.

MISS P. You don't understand. When I was a silly young girl, I did so want a lover like the other girls I knew, and I was told of a love charm I could purchase, and I sent for one, —and got this letter with it, and I read it, and read it until I made myself believe that Perseus MacCardle was my sweetheart, and cared for me, and that "dear" meant he loved me, and "very truly yours" that he was truly mine, and then, to keep up the deception, I posted this letter to myself in a fresh envelope every day and went to the post every evening and got it again. (*Sobs.*)

FELICIA (*sorrowfully*). For thirty years?

MISS P. Every day for thirty years, rain or shine, Miss Felicie; rain or shine, summer and winter.

FELICIA. I am so sorry, Miss Paisley, so sorry your little romance is so ruthlessly shattered. (*Walks back and forth.*) If I had *known*.—Oh, why didn't I think quick enough!

MISS P. Don't blame yourself, Miss Felicie; I was a silly old woman.

FELICIA (*to her*). Nonsense. You are romantic, Miss Paisley. You are not really old.

MISS P. (*with a sob*). I am over forty.

(*Every one looks shocked.*)

FELICIA (*quickly*). Sh! Don't whisper it! You don't look so old! I wouldn't take you for thirty!

MISS P. (*smiling*). Really?

FELICIA (*patting her shoulder*). Don't give up yet, Miss Paisley; while there's life, there's hope.

MISS P. (*blowing her nose, and putting away her handkerchief and letter*). You are wonderfully comforting.

MISS O. (*to FELICIA*). Well, I guess I must be movin' now.

MISS L. So must I. (*To FELICIA.*) I've had a perfectly lovely evening, Miss Felicia. So glad I came.

(*Turns and faces MRS. B.*)

MRS. B. (*viciously*). I am glad *you* enjoyed yourself, Miss Long.

MISS L. (*giggling, and going toward door c.*). Immensely! Immensely!

FREE. (*coming in c.*). There's a gentleman out here a-askin' for Mis' Biddle.

MRS. B. (*in horror*). For me? Impossible—who is he?

FREE. He says to tell you he's Captain Hip-Hip-Hip—(*swallowing*) polytus Biddle just back from the sea!

MRS. B. (*rising in consternation*). There must be some mistake—there ain't nobody of that name—I made it up. I never thought any one would be walkin' around the face of this earth with such an outlandish name. (*Takes hold of FREE.*) Freedom, are you joking? (*Shakes her.*) I can't stand much more after the events of this evening.

FREE. (*her teeth chattering*). No, ma'am,—he's on the porch.

FELICIA (*r.*). Invite him in, Freedom.

FREE. I did, ma'am, but he said to tell Mrs. Biddle to come out to see him,—he'd ruther see her fust alone.

MRS. B. What shall I do?—I can't face him,—he—he'll murder me for masqueradin' around with his name. I—I— (*Sobbingly.*) Miss Oggsby, what *shall* I do?

MISS O. (*piously*). The Lord is answerin' your prayers, Mis' Biddle. It'd be flyin' in the face of Providence not to go out and see that man.

MRS. B. (*tremulously*). You think so?

(*Warn Curtain.*)

MISS O. I have it as a firm conviction, Mis' Biddle. "All things work together for good to them that love the Lord."

MRS. B. (*drying her eyes*). My, how comforting it is to have you around quotin' Scriptor!

MISS P. Ain't it, now!

MRS. B. (*with some hesitation*). Well, here goes. (*Goes to door c., then turns in doorway. Imploringly.*) If you hear me scream, or anything,—come quick, won't you? He may try to kill me or something.

FELICIA. We'll be listening, Mrs. Biddle, and at the least outcry —

MISS P. We'll be there to rescue you from the clutches of the villain.

(MRS. B. *wavers for an instant, then exits c. The ladies arm themselves with fire-tongs, shovel, tea-trays, etc., MISS L. with a teacup, and form in a V ready to rush the door. MRS. B. screams outside.*)

ALL. What is it? He's killing her! He's murdering her!

(*They rush toward door c.*)

MRS. B. (*appearing c., excited, breathless, triumphant*). It's him! It's him!

ALL. Who? Captain Biddle?

MRS. B. No—no—Jimmy! My Jimmy!—He's come back! And he kissed me!

ALL. What?—The wretch!—The villain!—How dare he!

MRS. B. We're going to be married to-morrow!

ALL. Oh!

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT III

EXTERIOR OF FREEMAN HOUSE. LATE AFTERNOON. SIX
WEEKS LATER

SCENE.—*Same as Act I, but now the garden is blossoming with well-kept flowers, the gate is hung, everything suggests a more prosperous period. All lights on.*

(MRS. M. and FREE discovered. FREE. is sweeping.)

MRS. M. (to FREE., who is sweeping dirt under bench L.). Don't sweep the dirt up in that corner, Freedom.

FREE. Yas'm. (*Continues.*)

MRS. M. Take the dust-pan, and gather it up. (FREE. sweeps dirt to centre of stage in a pile.) Don't sweep it into the path where every one will walk over it!

FREE. Yas'm,—but dis is the easiest way, and I hes hed so much to do to-day, Mis' Murray.

MRS. M. Yes, I know, but it is important to leave the place looking just as neat as possible.

FREE. Yas'm. (*Leans on broom.*) Oh, Mis' Murray, do you reckon Miss Felicia will eber come back here again to lib?

MRS. M. (C.). I hope so, Freedom. We should sadly miss her if she didn't come back.

FREE. Yas'm, that's so. (*Reflectively.*) But it am a long way back to New Orleans.

MRS. M. Very true.

FREE. And her lubber may be dead in de wahr.

MRS. M. (*with a sigh*). I fear so.

FREE. She ain't neber hed no letter from him sense they fit and he lit out.

MRS. M. No.

FREE. (*with determination*). I's gwine to stick to Miss Felicia no matter what happens.

MRS. M. You are a loyal little girl, Freedom, but it would be kinder to your mistress if you would stay here in Lilac with me.

FREE. How's dat, Mis' Murray?

MRS. M. It takes a lot of money to go all the way to New Orleans.

FREE. Yas'm.

MRS. M. And Miss Felicia isn't rich.

FREE. She own dis house what grandpa left us, don't she?

MRS. M. (*smilingly*). Yes.

FREE. An' he left us money, too, didn't he?

MRS. M. Some; but not enough that Felicia can afford to take you and Mamselle home with her.

FREE. She neber mentioned that to we-all.

MRS. M. I know; dear, tender-hearted Felicia couldn't bear to make you both feel bad, and so she is straining and pinching herself to take you and Mamselle along with her.

FREE. Is dat de truf, Mis' Murray?

MRS. M. Yes, Freedom.

FREE. (*blinking hard to keep back the tears*). Then I isn't gwine. I's gwine to stay right here an' look after dis here house until Miss Felicia come back home again. (*Gulps.*) I did so want to see Tom, an'—an'—— (*Bravely.*) But I kin libe if I neber set eyes on them black boys again!

MRS. M. (*laying her hand on her shoulder*). You are a brave child, Freedom. There, there, don't cry.

FREE. I ain't gwine to cry—(*sobbing*) I ain't gwine to cry!

(*Sobbingly rushes into house.*)

MRS. M. (*sighing*). Poor little, homesick, lonely black girl! (*Takes broom which FREE. left against bench L., and the dust-pan from bench, and gathers dirt, talking.*) I wish I were rich enough to send her and Mamselle along with Felicia!—I should feel so much easier in my mind, too, if they were along with her!

(*Places pan on bench and stands broom beside it.*)

NORMA (*coming from house*). Mother? Mother?

MRS. M. Yes, dear? (*Turns.*)

NORMA (*coming down steps*). Have they come?

MRS. M. Sh! Miss Felicia may hear you.

NORMA (C.). She is crying her heart out in her room.

MRS. M. Poor child! It is a sad wrench to leave the old house.

NORMA. But she will come back in a few months.

MRS. M. We hope so, dear, but there is no telling what may happen to prevent.

NORMA. New Orleans is a long way, isn't it, mother?

MRS. M. Very.

NORMA. And traveling takes so much money!

MRS. M. Precisely. And you know, dear, Miss Felicia is not so very rich.

NORMA (*surprised*). Isn't she?

MRS. M. (*smiling*). Why did you suppose she taught school if she were?

NORMA (*ingenuously*). Because she liked to,—because she loved all the boys and girls who went to the school.

MRS. M. (*laughing pleasantly and pinching NORMA's ear*). Foolish darling! Of course she loved them! Her great heart loves every one she comes in contact with. But, darling, she needed the money the teaching brought her.

NORMA. I understand now why she is sobbing so. I wish she'd stay!

MRS. M. Norma, I can reiterate your desires.

NORMA. Tell her to stay, mother. She does most everything you want her to.

MRS. M. That is it, dear, and I want her to go back to New Orleans.

NORMA (*astonished*). Why, mother!

MRS. M. (*sitting on bench L., pushing over the dust-pan*). Listen, dear.

NORMA (*approaching*). Yes, mother.

MRS. M. You have seen that miniature on the mantel in the parlor?

NORMA (*admiringly*). The handsome young man in the soldier's uniform?

MRS. M. Yes, dear.—And you have guessed who he might be?

NORMA. Her lover! Miss Felicia told me so herself.

MRS. M. (*making room for NORMA on bench*). They quarreled a long time ago, and Miss Felicia came North to live.

NORMA (*sitting beside her mother*). Where is he now, mother?

MRS. M. That is what we do not know, and why I want Miss Felicia to go back home.

NORMA. To find him?

MRS. M. If he is to be found, darling.

NORMA. Perhaps he is dead.

MRS. M. That is what I fear, Norma. That is what Miss Felicia fears, and why she is sobbing her heart out now.

NORMA. Didn't he ever write to her?

MRS. M. Never.

NORMA. Why, mother?

MRS. M. (*rising*). There, there, run along in and see that the tea things are ready. (NORMA *rises*.) I see some of the ladies coming now. Tell Mamselle to get Miss Felicia ready to see them.

NORMA (*at gate*). Yes, mother.

MRS. M. (*handing*). Take this broom and dust-pan with you. And don't forget it is a *surprise* for Miss Felicia.

NORMA (*as she runs up steps with broom and dust-pan*). I shan't tell her! [Exit C., into house, gaily.]

(MRS. M. *crosses R. to well, as MISS P., her hair much more becomingly dressed, her clothing in better taste, a pleasant look upon her face, and MRS. D., with red eyes and nose, sobbing and sniffing and using her handkerchief constantly, come in L.*)

MISS P. (*crossing to MRS. M.*). Oh, this is so charming of you, Mrs. Murray.

(*All ladies exchange curtsies.*)

MRS. D. (*about L. C.*). I want to cry so that I don't know what to do! (*Wipes her eyes.*) To think of our Miss Felicia going away from us!

(*Sits on bench L. and sobs all through act.*)

MRS. M. (*crossing L.*). She will come back, I am sure.

MISS P. (*C.*). Mis' Murray, I've lived a lifetime in this village, and I never could enjoy hearing a baby's cry, the noise of little children laughing in their play, nor the voice of young love; but since Miss Felicia came to us, and stripped life of its hollow mockeries and shams,—I—(*happily*) I—Mis' Murray, I want to hear the children singing and dancing all the time. I feel as if Time had turned back in its course, and we were all young again! (*Her face glows with happiness and kindness.*)

MRS. M. Adeline, your cheeks are so pink, your eyes so bright.—I really believe you *are* a girl again!

MISS P. In my heart, I know I am! That romance that I'd built up around Perseus had become like a millstone around my neck. I feared my poor romance would be discovered, and I was growing old and haggard, living in dread

of the evil hour when my deception would come to light. And when dear Miss Felicia, all unconsciously, stripped the lie from its husks and laid bare my secret of thirty years, I —— (*Joyfully.*) Why, I love the whole world, and my heart is no longer empty. There is so much I can do, so many I can love,—little children, old men and women who are lonely and ill! (*With sincerity.*) Mrs. Murray, did you ever think of heaven being like *Lilac Village*?

MRS. M. (*smiling in spite of herself*). I never *had* made that comparison, Adeline.

MRS. D. (*sobbingly*). It never would have been if Miss Felicia hadn't come to live in it.

MISS P. Don't you recollect the day she come, how I said we might find we were entertaining angels unawares?

MRS. D. (*warmly*). And we have, haven't we?

Enter MISS L., L., charming, because she is not affected. She curtsies to all, and they return it.

MRS. M. (*in astonishment*). Why, Miss Long! How sweet you look.

MRS. D. And how young!

MISS L. (*pleased*). Really? I can feel myself blushing like a girl in her 'teens!

(*Crosses down R., free from her mincing manners.*)

MRS. M. No one would think you beyond them, Lucretia.

MISS L. When I think what I was six weeks ago! Ugh! I hate myself! Lilac was so dull then, and I had trained myself to live in the clouds of romance until I was growing old and silly, and I know I was the laughing-stock of every one of sense. But now—(*turning around*) well, look at me!

MISS P. (*stepping over and kissing her*). We are both girls together, Lucretia!

MISS L. I do believe that's the first time you've said a kind word to me in all your life, Adeline Paisley!

MISS P. (*seriously, pulling her down beside herself on bench R.*). I never mean to say an unkind thing to any one again, so long as I live!

MISS L. (*seated; reflectively*). Strange what an influence Miss Felicia has had over both of us, Adeline, isn't it?

MRS. D. (*from bench L., sobbingly*). Over all of us, Miss Long. I know if it hadn't 'a' been for Miss Felicia, I would

have grown into a sour, ill-tempered, disagreeable wife. But Robert says (*sobbing*) I am the sweetest, dearest, loveliest — (*Sobs.*) I can't remember all the nice things he keeps saying. (*Sobs.*) Why, it's just like having a honeymoon all over again.

MRS. M. (*humorously*). Like the one you had when you were married?

MRS. D. (*still sobbingly*). Please don't recall that to me again, Mrs. Murray. I was a selfish, ill-natured woman, and I didn't realize what a good man I'd married. If I had been like I am now (*heavy sob*), do you suppose I'd ever have come up here to spend my honeymoon all alone here in Lilac with Miss Paisley? (*Sobs.*)

MRS. M. (*much amused*). Not even if Adeline were the angel she is now?

MRS. D. (*very positively*). Not even if she was Miss Felicia herself.

MISS O. (*hurrying in R.; she too is better dressed, pleasanter in aspect*). Am I too late?

MRS. M. We are not all here yet, Miss Oggsby.

(*All curtsy; then MRS. M. sits on bench L. beside MRS. D.*)

MISS O. (C.). Thank goodness! I always hate to come late to a party; it looks as if one just came in for the refreshments.

MRS. M. (*smilingly*). I'm afraid you'd feel dissatisfied if you did come for that part of the affair, Miss Oggsby, for what we are to eat,—it is of the lightest kind.

MISS O. I don't care about anything much what's filling to-day,—(*glowingly*) I've had such a good dinner.

MISS L. (*with a trace of her old manner*). Yes?

MISS O. (*sharply*). You don't need to get sarcastic, Lucretia Long.

MISS L. I? Why, the very idea!

(*Barely suppresses her old impulse to giggle.*)

MISS O. I don't feed my men-folks in the way I did afore Miss Felicie come here. They get something more fillin' than stale-bread puddin' an' prunes for dinner! (*Joyously.*) And the best part of it all is, I am filled up full with *boarders* all the time! And I'm thinkin' of hirin' Aunt Sally to come and do the cookin'!

MISS L. Virtue is its own reward, Miss Oggsby.

MISS O. It ain't virtue, Lucretia Long, it's downright honesty!

MISS P. (*rising and crossing toward gate*). Hadn't we better go on in? The time's all too short before the coach comes.

MRS. M. (*rising*). Don't you think we might wait a few minutes longer for Mrs. Biddle and Mrs. Addison?

(*Goes to L. C.*)

MISS O. (R. C.). Is Mis' Addison coming?

MRS. M. I hope so.

MISS O. Mis' Murray, do *you* know, the way that woman sticks around here in Lilac where she ain't wanted, considerin' her charac-ter,—I—I—Mis' Murray, do you believe she's bright?

MRS. M. (*embarrassed, and looking L. uneasily*). Why, I—I——

MISS O. (*not waiting a reply*). I know what you'd say,—it's writ on your face,—“She has plenty of brass and is highly polished!”

MRS. M. (*still glancing L.*). Be careful! She's coming down the street.

MISS O. (*turning down R.*). I ain't sed nothin' I wouldn't just as soon say afore her face.

Enter MRS. A., L., radiant.

MRS. A. Oh, I am so happy!

(*Curtsies are quickly hurried through.*)

MRS. M. What has happened, Mrs. Addison?

MRS. A. I had a letter last night——

ALL. A letter?

MRS. A. I'm going away from Lilac.

ALL. No?

MRS. A. (*joyfully*). I am going back home again!

ALL (*astonished*). Going home? You are?

MRS. A. Yes, my husband has sent for me!

MISS O. But we all supposed you was divorced!

(MISS L. *shakes her head at MISS O. in disapproval.*)

MRS. A. (*with a start*). Oh? (*With some warmth.*) I don't know why you got that idea, but after the story started it

wasn't worth contradicting! My husband and I had had a disagreement,—it was such a ridiculous matter—I laugh to think that we should have quarreled over such a trifle,—and so we separated, and I came here to see if I—if we couldn't forget it, and—well, neither of us would give in we were wrong until — (To Miss L.) Dear Miss Long, do you recollect what you prophesied from the leaves in my teacup six weeks ago?

MISS L. (*on bench R.*). No?—a letter?

MRS. A. (*C.*). A letter.

MISS L. You see my prophecies *do* come true.

MRS. A. (*pleasantly*). I did my part to bring it about, though.

MISS P. (*interested*). I want to know.

MRS. A. (*with pathos*). I did so want to go home, but there was always my stubborn pride.

MRS. M. (*L. C., sadly*). Pride has been the stumbling-block of most of us women in Lilac.

MRS. A. I know. Well, that night, just as soon as I got home, I sat down and wrote to Frederick and told him I was in the wrong. That I had been watching cats since I came to Lilac, and that ours was licking her paw, just as I said —

ALL (*eagerly*). Yes? Yes?

MRS. A. Well, he wrote back to-day and said that he'd kept watching our cat ever since he'd got my letter, and he was still sure that she was washing her face,—but to come home just the same. (*Joyfully*.) And I'm going to-night!

MISS O. Before he gets a chance to change his mind?

MRS. A. Before he gets a chance to change his mind, precisely!

MISS O. But suppose when you get there and see the cat a-cleaning up afore the hearth —

MRS. A. (*with decision*). I shall always hold to my opinion that she is licking her paw!

MISS P. But if Frederick insists she *is* washing her face?

MRS. A. (*smiling*). I shall not contradict him; life's too short to quarrel over such trivial matters.

MISS P. I do believe Miss Felicia has rejuvenated you, too, Mrs. Addison.

MRS. A. She has.

NORMA (*appearing on porch*). She is coming!

(*Ladies arrange themselves.*)

FELICIA (*appearing on porch and coming down steps in astonishment, followed by MAM., who carries her wraps*). Why — Oh, what does this mean?

ALL (*curtsying*). Surprise! Surprise!

(Miss L. giggles as of old.)

FELICIA (*at foot of steps*). I am so bewildered, so unprepared, why —

MAM. (*just above her, on step*). But I tole you dey vas comin', Miss Felice,—I tole you dis afternoon.

FELICIA (*warmly*). But did you make me believe it? *Did you make me believe it?*

MISS P. Miss Felicie, we-all feel so grateful to you for all that you have done for us, for all the happiness you have brought to Lilac Village, we felt we must come down to the dear old house to say good-bye to you.

FELICIA (*touched*). Not "good-bye," I hope.

MAM. Not good-bye! Non,—non,—adieu!

FELICIA (*smilingly*). Until we meet again.

MISS P. And we-all have brought you some little thing to remember us by when you are far away.

(*Passes a tiny package which she has brought. Each lady steps forward and hands the perplexed FELICIA something in a paper.*)

FELICIA (*bewildered*). How lovely! How thoughtful! How can I begin to thank you for being so kind to me?

MISS L. (*as she steps across with her gift*). It is us who owe you the thanks, Miss Felicia.

FELICIA. You?

MISS L. Yes, us—all of us, Felicia dear.

FELICIA (*as she lays the gifts into MAM.'s hands*). But I—I do not understand. What have I ever done so very kind?

MRS. A. You brought the sweetness of your beautiful life among us, and as we came to know you from day to day, we have found ourselves changed, transformed —

MISS P. (*completing*). Rejuvenated.

FELICIA (*on verge of tears*). I did not realize.

MRS. D. No one who is accomplishing good has time to realize, Miss Felicia. (*Sobs.*)

FELICIA. Although I am so sorry to leave Lilac, where I have been so much at home, where you have all treated me as

if I were not a stranger, where — (*Represses her tears.*) I feel almost happy now to be going, since I know that you will miss me.

MISS O. Miss you? Well, I should say we would! It's like losin' one's backbone! (*Sinks on bench R.*)

FELICIA. I hope—I hope—indeed I do, to come back again, —before very long. And perhaps—perhaps —

(*Breaks down and sobs on MRS. M.'s shoulder. MAM. places the wraps, etc., on porch. FREE. brings out the hand-luggage and places beside them on the porch.*)

MRS. M. Now don't cry, Felicia; be a brave girl. It will all come out well in the end. I know it.

MISS L. (*rising*). I played solitaire all day yesterday, and the cards kept telling me that there was a great, great happiness in store for you, Felicia dear.

MISS O. (*drawing MISS L. to bench beside her*). I'm glad you sometimes read pleasant fortunes, Lucretia.

MAM. (*coming down from porch*). Shall I haf zee tea served here, Miss Felice?

FELICIA. If you please, Mamselle.

(*MAM. exits into house. FELICIA sits on bench L.*)

MRS. M. I had Aunt Sally come over and make some crullers and jumbles, and Mamselle has made the tea, so that we can all be reminded of that night six weeks ago when —

MISS P. (*quickly*). When we all dropped off our shams and —

MISS L. (*quickly*). Artificialities —

MISS O. And dishonesty —

MRS. D. And selfishness —

(*Sobs until her next remark.*)

MRS. A. And non-forgiving spirit —

MRS. M. (*completing the sentence*). And became the selves the Maker intended we should be.

MRS. B. (*hurrying in R., carrying a cup and saucer unwrapped. She is gaily dressed and radiant*). Oh, am I too late?

(*Crosses C., curtsies and hands FELICIA the cup and saucer.*)

MISS O. (*from bench R.*). The tea is not yet served, Mrs. Biddle; you are in plenty of time.

MRS. B. (*C., turning to her*). Mehitable, call me no more Biddle; call me Maria. Captain Hippolytus Biddle has gone on his last voyage.

MISS P. (*piously, but humorously*). May he rest in peace!

MRS. B. Amen to them sentiments, Adeline. But while it may seem most unbecoming in one so recently bereaved —

MISS O. Of a husband of twenty years' standing —

MISS L. (*humorously*). And married not quite six weeks —

MRS. B. (*pathetically*). It was an awful struggle!

MRS. D. (*stopping her sobs a moment*). To get married so soon after the demise of the Captain?

MRS. B. No, no —

MRS. D. What then?

MRS. B. To keep up the pretense for twenty years, when I really had no husband.

MISS P. I sympathize with you, Maria.

MRS. B. (*taking her hands*). We were sailing in the same boat, weren't we?

MISS P. (*with pathos*). But your romance came true, while mine —

MRS. B. Adeline Paisley, it may be that you never will meet your Perseus in this world, nor the next, for all that, but you are the sweetest, the most charming —

MISS P. (*with a flash of amusement*). Old maid?

MRS. B. (*earnestly*). People may call you that, but if they knew,—if they knew —

MISS P. Knew what?

MISS O. Speak it right out in meeting, or else forever after hold your peace.

MRS. B. There is eternal youth in your heart; you will never, never be old.

MISS P. (*happily*). Maria, I'm going to kiss you for that.

(*They embrace C., and sit on bench R. All but FELICIA rise.*

MAM. and FREE. carry in a set table from the house.
Then a chair.)

SALLY (*following them in, and coming down to FELICIA, who is L.*). Is you surprised to see your Aunt Sally here agen, Miss Felicie?

FELICIA (*rising*). A little, Auntie.

SALLY. When I heered you-all was gwine to lebe us, I so

wanted to gibe you sumthin' for bein' so kind to me an' Joe, an' as I was too pore to make you a handsome presente, I jest tole Mis' Murray I'd come over an' make you some jumbles an' doughnuts to show our 'preciation. (*Offers her one.*)

FELICIA (*taking jumble*). Thank you, Aunt Sally, thank you! You couldn't have shown your love in a sweeter way.

SALLY. Lor' bless you, honey!

(*She begins to pass the tray of doughnuts and jumbles.*)

FELICIA *re-sits on bench* L. MRS. M. *sits behind tea-table* C., and *begins pouring*, MAM. and FREE. *quickly passing the tea. Add red lights, reduce the whites, and gradually lower, until at dance it is sunset once more.*)

MRS. A. Miss Long?

MISS L. Yes?

MRS. A. Are you going to read our fortunes from our cups?

MISS L. (*smiling*). Do you want me to?

MRS. B. (*with force*). I, for one, don't!

MISS L. (*smiling*). Haven't you forgiven me?

MRS. B. I never shall to my dyin' day.

MISS L. There was a happy ending, wasn't there?

MRS. B. 'Tweren't no fault of yourn that Jimmy come back in the nick of time and saved me from wearin' widder's weeds the rest o' my mortal days!

HAN. (*running in R., letter in hand*). Miss Felicia! Miss Felicia!

FELICIA (L.). Yes?

HAN. Here's a letter for you.

FELICIA. A letter? (*In surprise; every one is excited.*) Has the coach come? (*Takes letter.*)

MAM. Oh, zee baggage, zee baggage!

(*Rushes wildly into house.*)

MISS L. (*rising, and looking R.*). I didn't hear the horn sound.

HAN. (C.). I got it last night and forgot to bring it over to you.

MISS O. (R., *vexed*). Hannah Jane, when will you ever recollect anything?

HAN. I don't know, ma'am.

FELICIA (*happily*). It is from him!—How did he know where to write?

MRS. M. (*rising from table, smiling*). I wonder.

FELICIA. Did you write and tell him?

MRS. M. (*putting her*). Open the letter and see what he says, dear.

(*Motions HAN. and FREE. to remove table, and they carry it to background, also the chair.*)

FELICIA (*to ladies*). You don't mind, do you? (*Opens it.*)

ALL. Not at all—not at all. Certainly not.

(*They gossip among themselves R., but still keep watching to see what FELICIA will do.*)

FELICIA (*as she opens letter drops a paper, then picks up paper, and opens it, discovering a ring. To MRS. M.*) Why, what do you suppose this is? (*All interested as she discloses ring. Then they look knowing. In horror.*) Oh, Mrs. Murray,—Mrs. Murray,—he—he sends me back my ring—he—he—Mrs. Murray, he's dead! (*Sobs.*) He's dead! My beautiful Charles is dead, dead!

(*Faints on MRS. M.'s shoulder.*)

MRS. M. Poor, poor girl! Have you some lavender salts, Miss Paisley?

MISS P. (*extracting bottle from her reticule and rushing across L.*). Thank goodness, I never go anywhere without them.

MISS L. (*to group at spring*). What a pathetic ending to our little surprise party!

FELICIA (*moaning*). He's dead—he's dead!

MISS O. (*to ladies*). I don't suppose it's none of my business, but I'm just filled with curiosity to know where he died! (*Crosses L. and picks up letter, and then stands C., examining.*) Mercy sakes! He can't be dead!—There's his own name, "Charles"!

ALL (*crowding around, HAN. standing on bench R.*). What? What?

MISS O. (*turning to beginning of letter*). I'm just going to read this letter.

ALL (*in horror, but with rather weak protests*). Oh, no! It wouldn't be right. I wouldn't. Perhaps——

MISS O. Swallow down your compunctions. I'm going to read it. What's a letter in comparison with the life of that

poor girl yonder? (*Reads it.*) He ain't dead. (*All ladies crowd about. FELICIA slightly revives, opening first one eye, shutting it, then the other, finally both.*) He's returned from the war,—safe,—and wants to be reconciled. And so he —

FELICIA (*severely*). Miss Oggsby, please pass me my letter.

MISS O. Certainly. (*Crosses and gives it to her.*) I wasn't at all curious, but I did so want to know.

FELICIA (*examining*). Why, it is in his own handwriting!

MISS O. (c.). Didn't I tell you so?

FELICIA. The Indian skirmish is over, and—and — Oh, Mrs. Murray, he begs my forgiveness, and he asks me to—if I can forgive him, to—just as a sign—to wear this ring.

MISS L. (*gaily*). Will you?

FELICIA (*seriously*). Of course I will,—as long as I live. (*Slips ring on her finger.*) It never, never shall leave this finger again.

MRS. M. (*kissing her*). Felicia, you have conquered your own stubborn temper. You, too, have been born again!

MRS. B. Then you won't leave us after all, Miss Felicie?

FELICIA (*smiling happily*). On the contrary, it is more important that I *should* go.

MISS P. We're so sorry to have to give you up.

FELICIA. Don't fret, dear heart, I'm coming back,—a happy bride.

MRS. B. (*stepping c.*). Seeing I'm a bride, I know just how happy you are going to be, and I don't begrudge you one single minute of your happiness, nuther!

MISS L. What could be more appropriate than to toast Miss Felicia in the waters of this dear old spring which has brought so much happiness into our lives?

(*She stands on bench R., dipper in hand. HAN. fills bucket of water, and Miss L. dips her dipper into it.*)

ALL (*taking their cups and crowding about Miss L.*). Lovely! Just the thing! How appropriate!

(*Miss L. pours water into each cup.*)

MISS L. (*holding high the dipper, every one facing toward FELICIA, L.*). Here's to the health and happiness of the sweetest, dearest bride who ever went from Lilac Village!

(*All raise cups, curtsy to FELICIA, then drink.*)

FELICIA (L., *curtsying*). Thank you, thank you !

(FREE. *quickly gathers cups, and then exits C., into house.*)

MISS P. I haven't felt so much like dancing since—since I was a girl !

MISS L. (*jumping down from bench gaily*). What prevents our celebrating the betrothal with a dance? (C.) Does any one say me nay?

FELICIA (*glancing about*). Have we time?

MRS. M. Just about.

(*The lights are now the hue of sunset.*)

MISS P. (*to MISS O.*). Your hand, Mehitable.

MISS O. Mercy sakes ! I ain't danced in years ! Not since I joined the Methodist Church !

MISS P. Neither have I, but I don't think it'll be set down agin us as a sin if we dance now—just this once !

(*Music of the dance. A Lanciers, but not too fast.*)

(*First couple, facing footlights, MISS O. and MISS P.*

Second couple, MISS LONG and NORMA.

Third couple, right side, FELICIA and MRS. A.

Fourth couple, left side, MRS. D. and MRS. B.)

Curtsy to partners.

Curtsy to corners.

Ladies chain, grand right and left, half-way round. Curtsy to your partner, swing partner, reverse. When you meet partner, curtsy and swing.

Curtsy to partner, take her hand. Forward to corners and back.

Forward to corners, pass through, curtsy to partner, swing partner, forward and pass through. Curtsy to partner. Swing partner.

Curtsy to partner.

Forward to corners and back.

Forward to corners, swing opposite lady. Back, curtsy to partner, swing partner.

Curtsy to partner.

Forward to corners, back.

Forward to corners, right hand across, half-way round. Let go of hands, curtsy inwards. Take left hands, reverse. Let go, curtsy inwards. Swing your partner.

Curtsy to partner. Curtsy to corners.

Ladies chain, grand right and left, half-way round. Curtsy to your partner. Swing your partner. Reverse. Curtsy to your partner when you meet her. Swing your partners.

First couple face footlights.

All sashet alternately right and left.

March, right and left, single file.

Promenade down centre to footlights.

Take hold of hand. Fall back in fours holding hands. Forward. Fall back, curtsy holding hands. Forward, swing partner to place.

Curtsy to partner. Curtsy to corners.

Grand chain, right and left half-way around.

Curtsy to partner. Swing partner. Reverse.

Curtsy to partner, swing partner to her position on stage.

(Near the end of dance, MRS. J. comes in R. with a basket of eggs, the insides of which have been blown, and joins in the dancing, bobbing up and down to an imaginary partner. As she dances she unconsciously tips basket, and from time to time an egg falls out. She steps on them, hopelessly breaking them.)

MRS. J. *(as dance ceases, and FELICIA sits breathless on bench R.)*. Faith, an' I've spilt every one of them eggs I was bringin' over to yers fer a little present seein' as you're goin' to leave us, Miss Felicia!

FELICIA *(on bench, laughingly)*. Oh, I hope not!

MRS. J. *(on her knees gathering them up)*. Every one of them is cracked! That's what comes of havin' feet what git the better o' one!

FREE. *(rushing in C., some documents in her hand)*. Oh, Miss Felicia, Miss Felicia, here am de papers!

FELICIA. What papers?

FREE. De ones grandfudder lef' us, an' what we nebber could find!

FELICIA *(rising and taking them)*. How do you know?

FREE. Mamselle, she can read, she said so.

FELICIA *(examining)*. Where did you find them? *(Crosses L. and gives to MRS. M.)* Look at them, Mrs. Murray.

FREE. *(R.)*. Under de eaves in de big garret.

FELICIA. How came you there?

FREE. Because—because—*(sobbing)* I didn't want to see you gwine away to leave us! An' I—I didn't want you to see me cryin' when you went. *(Tries not to cry.)*

FELICIA (*patting her*). You poor child !

MRS. M. (*brightly*). It is all true, Felicia, you are rich.

FELICIA. You mean that ?

MRS. M. Your grandfather tells in these papers where is the balance of his fortune, and, Felicia, it is even larger than I had believed. You shall never, never want for anything again !

FELICIA (*taking papers*). Let me look at it myself. (*Happily*.) Oh, Mrs. Murray, this *is* like a fairy tale !

MISS L. And you the princess !

FELICIA. And I the princess ! (*Horn blows off stage R.*) There's the coach.

MAM. (*appearing on porch excitedly, grabbing up the bonnet and shawl*). Oh, Miss Felice ?—Miss Felice,—zee coach—zee coach !

FELICIA. Yes, I'm coming, Mamselle.

(*Goes to steps and MAM. ties on the bonnet and places the shawl over her shoulders.*)

MAM. Freedom, get Miss Felice's baggage.

FREE. Yas.

(*Goes up steps, picks up the luggage, and carries it down steps.*) *Warn Curtain.*

MAM. (*tying bonnet and kissing FELICIA*). I hope you will be back soon, Miss Felice.

FELICIA. Very soon, Mamselle.

MRS. M. (*R. C.*). You must hurry, Felicia.

FELICIA. Yes, Mrs. Murray. (*To FREE., coming down the steps.*) Good-bye, Freedom. (*Takes her hand kindly.*)

FREE. Good-bye.

(*Goes down stage and sets the luggage C., then retires to L. corner trying not to cry.*)

FELICIA. Good-bye, Mamselle.

MAM. Adieu, Miss Felice,—adieu !

FELICIA (*still at gate*). Take good care of yourself and Freedom.

MAM. (*on step*). Oui, oui, Miss Felice.

FELICIA. I'll be back before you know it.

MRS. M. (*playfully*). And with your handsome husband, Felicia.

FELICIA (*laughing and kissing her*). Good-bye, dear, dear

Mrs. Murray. (*Shakes hands down the left and then the right.*)
Good-bye, everybody. You—you have all been so—so good to me. (*To FREE. again.*) Good-bye, Freedom.

(*She picks up her band-box, MRS. M. picks up the carpet-bag, and they exeunt R., hastily.*)

ALL (*waving handkerchiefs, some standing on benches.*)
Good-bye! Good-bye! Come back soon, Miss Felicia! Come back soon!

Miss O. Hannah Jane, we'll go on home.

HAN. Yes'm.

(*They go off R. Ladies prepare to go, though one or two still wave from benches and toss kisses. MAM. is on porch waving and weeping by turns.*)

FREE. No, I ain't gwine to cry! I ain't gwine to cry no more!

(*With loud sob she rushes up steps and disappears into house. Coach horn sounds off R. A rumble of wheels and clatter of hoofs. The ladies give a few more flutters of their handkerchiefs, and cry, "Good-bye! Good-bye!" Orchestra bursts into "Auld Lang Syne."*)

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